An Interview with

Ed King

March 26, 1981

Interviewed by

John Griffin Jones

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
Post Office Box 571
Jackson., Mississippi 39205

AU 107
OHP 373

Interviewee:	King, Ed
Interviewer:	Jones, John Griffin
Title:	An interview with Ed King, March 26, 1981 / interviewed by John Griffin Jones
Scope Note:	This recording was selected to be digitally remastered through the National Endowment for the Humanities Civil Rights Era Recordings Grant in 2004.

AU 107

JONES: Alright. Ok. This is John Jones with the Department of Archives and History and [inaudible] and I'm back with Reverend Edwin King for our third interview, I believe, yeah, and we're in Ed's car on the way to Philadelphia, Mississippi, going up the Natchez Trace on a beautiful day in late March, March 26, 1981. Perhaps the best thing I can do Ed, is just put you in a…get a timeframe in your mind and kind of let you go and pick up, as we've done on our last two trips, just let me pick on certain things that I'd like to…

KING: Ok.

JONES: …emphasize. I was listening to the last tape that we did yesterday, and we ended with you talking about the funeral of Medgar Evers and the kind of spontaneous demonstration on the streets of Jackson following that…following Medgar's funeral. When we…I talked to John Salter and you about this pretty extensively, and we know from you two that pretty much marked the end of an era so far as the movement in Mississippi with the death of Medgar Evers. That his death ended the era of the lone operator in Mississippi and kind of focused some national attention, at any rate, on Mississippi and opened up…and more or less, made the Civil Rights Movement a, you know, a more substantial thing in Mississippi with his death. He was a martyr to the cause, so to speak. Let me just get you, if I could, to pick up there if you could tell me something about the eventual demise of the Jackson Movement and something about where the Civil Rights Movement went from there.

KING: Ok. I think the most important thing is that Jackson never had a strong local Civil Rights Movement after the death of Medgar Evers. There was certainly movement activity by some of the same people. Mrs. Allison, head of the local NAACP, remained very active and very loyal to the memory of Medgar. But…then there were other Jackson people who came into the [Freedom] Democratic Party, some activities with COFO, and so on. But never a strong movement here. Never strong with the clergy here, although some ministers participated in some things, but what this meant to a state is something that's hard to figure out but it I think, it caused us constant problems. The COFO state offices were here in Jackson dealing not with the local Jackson Movement as part of a statewide COFO Movement, but dealing with things outside of Jackson. There were crises in Jackson. There would be demonstrations at the legislature. There would be shootings at Jackson State frequently. That's not [inaudible] the right word. By frequent, I mean about every year there were…there was trouble out there for six or eight years. Things happened in Jackson, but never from the base of a strong local people's movement doing it. Jackson at that time was more a

part of Mississippi than any other southern city. Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, those kind of places certainly were part of their states, but they also, were big enough to be separated from their states. I never felt comfortable, even at the strongest moments of COFO, that we could really have a strong, ongoing movement in the state without also having a strong movement locally in Jackson. Territorially, COFO had left Jackson to the NAACP. That was ’62, ’63, ’64, along in there. And that worked alright when it was Medgar Evers. Once it was Charles Evers, it did not work because he was not interested in working with COFO. He may have been interested in working against it. I don’t know. But it was a strange creature. A massive people’s movement in Mississippi and the logical head of it up there. And we were building a body that had no head. We could have the normal tensions of people outside of Jackson resenting things being done in the city in talking about all those COFO people in the office making decisions about what we’re supposed to do in, you know, Pelahatchie. And it became true, because there was no similar movement going on in the city. And the people who worked in the headquarters in Jackson began to be a little too isolated from people in the rest of the state. Nothing could be done about it, because no movement could be built in Jackson after the movement that Medgar left was smashed. I seem awful long-winded this morning. Well, so there are heavy consequences to having things end with Medgar.

JONES: Was Charles Evers…was it his personal sensibility about the Civil Rights Movement that led to the inaction…to his inaction to the lack of concentrated effort here in Jackson or was it that he was pressured by Roy Wilkins and others in the national NAACP or do you feel like you can say?

KING: I feel like I can say. I can’t prove. I think it was three things. That’s two of them. I think he was insensible to the…insensitive to the kind of needs here in Jackson and to having a movement here in Jackson [that was a] direct action movement. He was certainly pressured by the national NAACP not to have a dynamic, unpredictable, uncontrollable movement in Jackson. I would assume the federal government was involved in pressuring the national NAACP, although not a lot of pressure is needed if you have a network of relationships in funding and support and all of that. It’s kind of everybody understands things. I imagine that Charles had to be taught to understand.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: I think he was under a third level of pressure, and that was from the white power structure in Mississippi. There is certainly nothing in his outward behavior to indicate that he was not bribed and/or threatened…I think probably both. The threats were coming into his office, anonymous telephone calls, this kind of thing. We heard that he had been paid money to

stop demonstrations in Jackson. I think he would have stopped them anyway because of his NAACP connections and probably had no problems at taking bribe money from Whites to stop things that he was going to stop, because he was being paid by the NAACP a salary to stop things in Mississippi. And he was being flattered by the Kennedy administration that it was the proper thing not to do things in Mississippi. So I think he probably pocketed the bribe money and laughed at the Whites in Mississippi that they were trying to do the very same thing the white liberal nationally were doing. And it's hard to say then that he was really bribed. He just took their money. But I can't prove that. I never felt there was anything that needed to be proved…

JONES: Yeah.

KING: …because what we had to be concerned with was the action and the activity and the consequences of that, and we certainly weren't about to make public statements about any black leaders being threatened or bribed. And we didn't want to try to track it down because we had other things to do and we on the Movement side of things considered Charles Evers so ineffective at leading anything positive. He could use his brother's name to stop things and say, "Medgar wouldn't want to do this." And that would confuse people until they figured out, well, no, Charles just doesn't know. Medgar did want to do this kind of thing. We didn't think that Charles Evers could ever succeed, and just kind of assumed within a year he would pack up and go back to Chicago or the people would see through him. And he really did not have much leadership outside the white world and a sm…a growing upper middle-class black community which was threatened by the movement and so, turned to Evers. And that was always growing.

JONES: So that was his following. I was going to ask you if he had any following.

KING: He began to get a following of schoolteacher types. [inaudible] people like this who had never supported his brother. But we still didn't think that he could be any threat to the Movement. But we would not challenge him, and we would not face up to the fact that Jackson didn't have a viable, local movement, and that to come in and do it would have meant the collapse of COFO. In a outward sense, the NAACP would have withdrawn totally. The reality is that the NAACP did withdraw from COFO, did not sponsor the Freedom Summer as things at the level of Wilkins' office. We went ahead, because the pretense of being a united movement was important and the local people were willing to identify with anybody. They thought of themselves as NAACP and SNCC and CORE and SCLC and Freedom Democratic Party and COFO and so on. And the local people had seen such a history of division in the black community that if we brought our divisions out into public fights, we thought that would discourage local people. It did not discourage the NAACP by '65 from coming out and attacking COFO…

JONES: Right.

KING: …locally. Or Evers lining up with Hodding Carter and folks like that and attacking the Movement when by then, he had something else to do. Somebody else had been giving support.

JONES: Right.

KING: So we made a terrible mistake by not picking up the pieces of a broken Movement in Jackson and a terrible mistake in not fighting what was going on.

JONES: Right.

KING: Maybe. It could be that this idea that, if you have this kind of fight openly, it will, you know, convince Blacks that the Civil Rights Movement is like everything else. The leaders can't be trusted. People will never stay together. We might have lost by doing it. Maybe we won more. We certainly won many important things. We may have won more by our approach, but it also meant that COFO, itself, and that Movement, in a sense, could not continue too long.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: That, you know, it…some things were bound to break. The way things operated here in the summer though, there was a very small SNCC staff in and out of Jackson. Finally established the COFO office with a large SNCC presence here in September of '63. But SNCC was still mainly working in Greenwood and the Delta. [CORE] were working in Canton, and Jackson had had a strong, local Movement under Medgar. So at first, there was no reason to think that it might not. The death of Medgar, in itself, was very important. I always felt that violence directed toward the Civil Rights Movement was very effective. That the people who rallied and said, "We won't let this murder get us down" would be the people 50 miles away. That the people who were the target of the violence did suffer and suffered immensely. The fear level went up. You had to face it, but nevertheless, it was in your guts. Morale was easy to maintain the first day or so. [inaudible], like any death, people rally around each other. And even as you express your grief, you still have the idea well, you hold yourself together through all of the ritual of the funeral and the burial and the [committal]. And then, you know through the weeks of loneliness and agony and pain. I think that would hold up in a lot of other communities where there was a direct attack and a leader was killed. And maybe, somebody of the stature of Dr. King, who was the leader for the whole nation. Then everybody who was following him had to go through a period of saying, "We will not be

turned back" but deal with your own horror and fear and grief and slow down for a while. So I think having a leader killed here in Jackson was very effective in cutting down on the strength and morale of the people. And maybe, another reason we didn't want to come to grips with the evil represented by what the federal government was doing or use…how they were using Charles Evers and so on, it was easier to deal with the clean memory of Medgar and just avoid things we didn't like. The way things developed here in Jackson though, in a technical sense, I think Salter must have talked to you about. Salter and I went into the hospital two, no, I guess one or two days before Medgar was buried in Arlington.

JONES: June 18th?

KING: Yeah, in June of '63. The settlement of the Jackson movement was imposed by the federal government, encouraged by the national NAACP, at persons brought in who certainly had some influence, ministers who had influence in the community but people who had not worked with Medgar Evers. Others who had didn't know what to do, because the key student elements, SNCC and Tougaloo people, were excluded from the final settlements. Salter and I were out of it. Eldri Salter, who had been an advisor, had gone to Minnesota with the Salter's daughter once the level of violence increased. It wasn't that Eldri was deserting the Movement, but Maria Salter was only a year old. A bullet had already been shot into their home and past above her crib. In December of '62, there was every reason to expect attacks on the leadership and Eldri would have been coming back and probably leaving the baby with her parents in Minnesota. But Eldri wasn't there and once John and I were attacked and so seriously injured, there was nothing we could do the critical two weeks, three weeks, there after Medgar's burial, and Jeanette would have been involved, mercy me. The students were being shut out of the meetings, the Tougaloo students who had really led and organized the Jackson Movement. The SNCC people were trying to figure what they would do. Things were moving very fast that summer. SNCC saw that it could not come in and take over and build a movement in Jackson. The idea of Martin Luther King coming to Jackson at the invitation of Medgar Evers and some local ministers meant nothing. He certainly couldn't move in on Charles Evers' territory. Evers certainly wasn't going to invite King in. The symbolism of what happened was that there was a fight to keep Martin Luther King out of sight at Medgar Evers' funeral with the national NAACP trying to do that, and only let King be visible when it was obvious that the reporters and cameras were going to find King and focus on him which wasn't right, but they were going to do that. And some of the visiting NAACP stars might have been lost out in the limelight. So there was concern to keep King from speaking at the funeral, but he couldn't you know, that wasn't a wise plot. At the funeral march Dr. King was put way back about the 20th rank of people. He was content to walk there but once again, he was noticed and I think that he was smart

enough to realize that the NAACP did not want him to look like he was a leader of anybody in Jackson He couldn't make up his mind what to do. I guess he was getting lots of contradictory advice. There was that kind of silly maneuvering going on. Not very silly when you're talking about a funeral, but there was that kind of mess gong on that early. I figured that, with Charles Evers, I might slowly establish a relationship and that Charles Evers was bound to take his advice from Roy Wilkins, [inaudible], people in the national NAACP office. I did not think that Charles and Medgar had been close. None of us ever heard Medgar talk about Charles. Now we assumed that Charles would take up the mantle or the cause of his dead brother, but would be advised by Wilkins whom he would think of as his brother's closest friend. And that there would be no way we could come in and say things like, "Do you know that Roy Wilkins fought your brother? Do you know that the NAACP was going to fire your brother from the job that you've just taken?" Because it would be unbelievable. And only slowly could we work with Charles and tell him what had really been going on. It soon became obvious that he did not want to know anything like that, and he was very strongly committed to the Wilkins [inaudible] anti-movement style, probably because he thought that's what his brother was. He may even have hated the Movement and resented the Movement, the direct action movement, because it brought about his brother's death. His brother, after all, had survived doing traditional NAACP-style stuff through all the horrors of the 50's in Mississippi. So that Charles may, may…he never said that to me…but he may have had some anger. Should have had some anger towards…towards this. I do know that Charles had no comprehension of what nonviolence was.

JONES: Yeah, right.

KING: I talked with him about that off and on for a year. He said that the NAACP was nonviolent, and that he didn't know how Dr. King could say he was nonviolent after Birmingham and all those people got hurt. To Charles Evers, a nonviolent movement was a successful movement in which no Blacks got hurt. I don't think he…he probably had never even heard Mahatma Gandhi, Thoreau or Woolman, in the Quaker tradition, Thoreau, New England, that kind of line of civil disobedience, I just don't think he'd even heard about it. Nonviolence meant if you could picket, got a good press, a successful picket line in which nobody was arrested or beaten was nonviolent. The Woolworth's sit-in, to him, was violence. Blacks had already had too much violence from Whites, and it made no sense for Blacks to go out and voluntarily let themselves get beat up. It was a very Black power line against nonviolence…

JONES: Right.

KING: …which he used very successfully. It also was a wonderful line that I

heard many middle-class Blacks, Tougaloo faculty and people like that, use through the years as to why they wouldn't support the nonviolent movement. And they would say, "It's alright for you people who are, but I'm a violent person." I couldn't take that. I'd be beating them up. I would fight back. Then we would ask them, "Well, will you help us in some other way?" And they'd never help us in any way. Some people may have meant that, but most of them used that as a line to talk militancy and not do anything. But that was the line Evers had. The only thing you could do in Jackson would be something that you knew would be protected, basically by the federal government. He accepted the idea of voter registration. Any successful voter registration effort was resisted. When you talk to Mrs. Allison, she can give you some of the inside, because she tried working on those things and when a successful voter registration drive was around, the national NAACP and Charles Evers intervened even to stop that. They told us to go into voter registration instead of direct action in much the same way that the Kennedys in 1961, tried to get SNCC to go into direct…go into voter registration in southwest Mississippi, southwest Georgia, instead of direct action, direct action having been sit-ins, picket lines, boycotts, Freedom Rides in 1961.

JONES: How could voter registration have been a threat to anyone by '63, early '64?

KING: Voter registration would become a threat if large numbers of Blacks were registered to vote. Voter registration was a threat here in Jackson when the local people, working with the local movement, would get 25 people a day to go to the courthouse. That suddenly began to look like a demonstration.

JONES: Direct action.

KING: People would not go to the courthouse three or four at a time or one single car because the car probably wouldn't get there. The car would be picked up for speeding or for running a purple light or running an orange light or something that didn't exist for false traffic fines. If you sent three carloads of people, you might be able to stay together. If you had people meet at a church and walk over, it was a demonstration. But there was no way to do voter registration in Mississippi by that point without direct action. We had tried and had basically failed. But as the voter drive became successful through the summer…Evers tried to stop it and block it and tell people not to go…the way things happened, the way he did things, was to turn the youth who were left…and most of the leaders were just sort of exhausted…but he quickly developed youth choirs, and he would let the people sing at mass meetings. The mass meetings continued maybe, two a week where they had been going every day. He would let the people sing about freedom. He would preach the most militant speeches and then, turn around and say, "We won't do it." He would announce, you know, we're going to have 100 people walk to the courthouse on Saturday to register.

We're going to make them keep it open on Saturday or this kind of thing. And I knew very quickly that we wouldn't. I tried to say this is just preacher talk and that there's a public style of saying things in the black community that don't…words don't mean the same thing that they do to me, and this may be because people were never allowed to act and do. And so, this tradition of saying something out loud and having the fulfillment from having said it, it was almost as well as having done it. And I don't mean just Evers doing this style. I had to learn to listen very carefully, because when Hamer said she meant it. A lot of other people could say things and it was not hypocrisy. It was not a lie. It was a form of speech, and you thought you were free. You thought you had done it. And it may go all the way back to a time in slavery where people may have gotten up and talked about this is what life is going to be like when we're free, or gotten up and said when we burn the mansion, and when we kill all the people that have been, you know, beating our women, got together in the swamp and did it every full moon night and never went out and attacked the Whites on the plantation.

JONES: Right.

KING: I don't, you know, we just don't have enough history, but what Evers was doing was something I'd seen many other people do, although, in the context of a movement where his brother had supported people marching in the streets, it was pretty confusing. People enjoyed the mass meetings though, and instead of the mass meeting being a preparation for what you would do during the day, the meeting became the movement.

JONES: Yeah, alright.

KING: You could shout anything. The choir would sing. He formed a Medgar Evers memorial youth choir and tried to turn the energies of the youth into that and then using the choir for fundraising. Sometimes through the year the choir would get sent out of state, that kind of thing, to raise money for the NAACP. Many of the younger kids came into that, junior high age particularly.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: …who had been to jail.

JONES: Right.

KING: But…and some of them had even been leaders. The high school age kids were more confused and demoralized. Ready. They went door to door on voter registration work trying to do what looked like a program package. Salter and I began to occasionally attend meetings, but the lull of our sickness in two or three weeks there, things were really set. The pattern had

really been set, and we already would be in a position of having to criticize Evers, Med…Charles, or teach him something. And we certainly could see that things had been broken. There was certainly tension and excitement in Jackson through the summer. There were many mass meetings where lots of NAACP literature was sold, memberships were sold. You know, buy a book on the history of the NAACP in memory of Medgar Evers, that kind of thing. The people would march inside the Masonic Temple. Charles would announce that this is the week we march, and we would march around the temple inside the halls of the auditorium singing songs. And then he would sort of say, "Next time, we march outside." We finally had one meeting. I've forgotten details now. Some things had gone on. Some of the things which had been desegregated were resegregated. Even the sell out compromise that had been negotiated, we think, by the federal government to end the things in Jackson didn't hold up. There was some, you know, Blacks could use some things. I think there were attempts used to resegregate the city parks. The swimming pools were closed. The things people thought they had won no longer existed. And something happened, and people were very angry. Things that had been…even the compromise itself, the city was reneging on. And at one mass meeting and the mood just built up that people were still ready, still believed that in six weeks when they had been told we're going to resume the marches, that we were going to. And the people voted to resume direct action. Announced there would be a march. You never tried to force people into it. And decided we would have a night march after the rally and march from the temple to the courthouse. Everybody knowing that likely meant mass arrests. Not just kids. More adults participating this time than ever before. And Charles Evers, graciously and triumphantly, accepted the position of leader of the march which was his natural inheritance. And people preached and prayed and read scripture and sang inside, and we organized two by two or four by four and marched.

JONES: What time of day?

KING: I would say it was like eight-thirty at night.

JONES: This is marching from the Masonic Temple on Lynch?

KING: On Lynch Street. We got up about, oh, around Rose Street, maybe not quite that far. The police sirens, everything, wailing all over town as the police were racing reinforcements out. Barricades were being set up in the street. Police cars, fire engines roaring up. Our hymns going. We were singing hymns as well as freedom songs, because hymns and scripture always had a freedom message to us.

JONES: Right.

KING: Met the police at the barricades. Charles Evers announced, " We will never be turned back by the police", and turned to the people.

JONES: A crowd of about how many people?

KING: It was dark. At least 50 to 75. A hunch would be 150 to 200, 'cause it stretched back.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: And I was…I was helping [inaudible] near the front, so I don't know how many people had fallen in line behind. And how many were debating [inaudible], because there were many walking along with us trying to decide will we join it. We sang, "Like a tree [inaudible]" and so on, which is from the Psalms, "we shall not be moved". And Charles Evers then turned to the people with his back to the police, and I wondered, "My God, what courage." He's got his back to them. They're libel to beat him and jump him from behind. It was not that Charles Evers was fearless as that I think he had nothing to be afraid of. I think he had more to fear if he didn't. Turned to the people and said, "This is the finest march we've ever had in Jackson. Now, turn around and go back to the temple and let us sing all the way back." And he told the youth choir to start singing. And he said, " I want you to sing so loud that those police hear us all the way back." And he started marching backwards. And I think Charles Evers has led the people backwards ever since. Occasionally having a good thought, because anybody has good thoughts. And Charles Evers has suffered enough personally and maybe, has even seen some lights, because occasionally, he's done some forward moving things or moved at a tangent which was his, eccentric kind of tangent, which happened to be a forward motion at the time.

JONES: Yeah, I wanted to ask you if he was…if you would ultimately say that he was a enemy to the black people struggling in Mississippi.

KING: Definitely.

JONES: Definitely. From '63 through today?

KING: Yes. And I think he was mostly created by liberal white America. The national press praised him, built him up, would refer to the kind of stunt he did as a successful demonstration where nobody, you know, where nobody was hurt. Nobody was…and he began to say, "In SNCC demonstrations, people go to jail. When I do it, they don't. Nobody gets beaten when they stand with me. You don't have to worry about your children suffering with me. You let your children go with SNCC and CORE and look what happens to them."

JONES: He didn't understand the point?

KING: I don't know whether he…I don't think he understood the point. If he did understand the point, then he never clearly rejected things in the sense of Malcolm X and the Black Muslims who seriously said that an internal revolution of black pride is needed, and an external revolution is needed against the capitalist monster of white America which is ruling the world, and that you black people…we black people are part of a worldwide movement of which America is the symbol of worldwide imperialism. He never gave that kind of analysis, which is what Malcolm X was doing and therefore, saying he would not participate in the nonviolence and nonviolence wasn't going to work. Malcolm X fully understood what Dr. King was talking about and differed with it and I think, respected Dr. King. I don't think Evers, Charles Evers, ever understood the power of nonviolence. Malcolm X, in most of his talking, did not understand that and when Malcolm met the people of Mississippi Movement, I heard…I didn't talk with him…I heard them saying, "He's telling us we may have to be violent. But he's also saying that maybe there's something to what we're doing." [inaudible] a good bit of interchange the last three or four months of his life particularly around the Freedom Democratic Party which he was helping [inaudible]

JONES: Yeah.

KING: Which the NAACP wasn't. And once you began to get help from people like Malcolm X, others ran faster to get away from you. But I don't think Evers understood. I think he genuinely meant it if he didn't want to see black people in jail or suffer.

JONES: But even his gubernatorial campaign and his further, you know, political work, has it been…has it been to the benefit of black Mississippians as a whole? Has he offered any kind…has he offered any kind of possibility?

KING: I don't think he has. Some good has come from his political work, but I think far more evil. It's certainly the majority…it's the dominant political style. It has been accepted, so I don't…I can't say he's had no influence. The influence has been immense, but I think it's done more harm than good.

JONES: Was there anybody…

KING: What he's saying right now in 1981 may do some good. He does a lot of quirky things, and he does things to get himself out front. [inaudible] If you have nothing to offer the people, you've got to get out and have a lot of publicity. If you're not going to really lead a movement, you've got to have a showing. And he's always done things that were bizarre that could get

him a good press. And he had an instinct for a good press anyway, and he's had a instinct when things were silent and nobody was hearing from him to make a statement that would get some attention.

JONES: Right.

KING: I think now, though, that his statement endorsing Reagan was courageous and may even have been wise. I think he really is seeing the corruption of what the liberals in the Democratic Party had done to the black community to control it, and how people had really sold their soul to participate in welfare. And his attacks on welfare and saying that that is not the answer for black people is right. Now, what he doesn't see is what Vincent Harding talked about, or Gandhi in perspective, that work is important to people. What Evers is seeing, through all the federal programs…and he helped to impose them on the state and he used them to help build his own political machines, 'cause he gave his cronies phony jobs in all these federal programs. The money was poured in partly because he was [inaudible] the Democratic Party. He used those things and now he's attacking them and throwing them away. It may only be because he is so personally corrupt that the people working in those poverty programs have had to run away from Evers in order to save their own programs from sinking with his hand in the till rather than letting people get phony grants for phony jobs that don't exist and hire a whole bureaucracy to administrate something that's nothing but corruption. But everybody gets paid a legitimate salary still for doing nothing worthwhile. Whereas Evers and people were actually ripping off money from it and the others who though they had real jobs that mattered may have had to exclude Evers and his style of Cliff Finch corruption from it. Anyway, Evers is now attacking that and saying these things make Blacks dependent and maybe he can really, really offer something now. Maybe he's had some kind of insight and conversion, but, nevertheless…Pardon me. Notice the sign that people keep repainting over there?

JONES: Billy's shithouse.

KING: Poor man. The high school kids must do that. Whatever it says on the tape, the poor man has a hand painted sign that is shirt shop. We're in the Choctaw area now, and Billy is a last name of many of the Choctaws [inaudible] Billy are John Billy. So it must be somebody in the extensive Billy family who's selling shirts.

JONES: That's in…yeah, that's interesting. A lot of them have last names like Sam, too. Isaac, Calvin Isaac. That is interesting. I interviewed him…I don't know if I told you…I interviewed him, Charles, in February, and he was gracious to give me about an hour and a half and was…not that I thought, I

mean, I don't think his insight into the, you know, into the promise of the Republican Party is as complete as you…

KING: I'm hoping, I haven't talked to him, I'm just hoping.

JONES: Right. I don't…

KING: And it may not be that the Republican Party can offer it. It's just that somebody had to say, "More welfare is not the answer."

JONES: Yeah.

KING: Maybe he has some insight there. Leaders don't…you can be, you know, leaders without much insight. I don't think he's wanted much insight. He's enjoyed being a leader.

JONES: Sure.

KING: You know, very flamboyant, fairly typical American political style.

JONES: Sure.

KING: With no substance. I mean, there's nothing that Charles Evers does that white America hasn't been the model for. I just think white America has encouraged him, built him up, and kept him going when the black community in Mississippi, I think, would have rejected him. I think, by the end of 1966, the NAACP would have been just about defunct in Mississippi, or local NAACP chapters which were still strong would have been so identified with the movement that Evers would have been gone. They were trying to replace him, the local NAACP was. And they would have burst their connections with the national. There was support throughout the country from local NAACP movements in touch with local leaders here in Mississippi like Mrs. Allison of brewing rebellion of those people wanting to support direct action on things everywhere in the country against the control imposed by the NAACP. And I think, by the end of '66, had Evers not been saved by the National Democratic Party and the Loyalist Democrats in Mississippi, chiefly Hodding Carter as the instrument, I think Evers was saved and imposed and forced on Blacks as their leader. And those Blacks who questioned were wiped out, discredited, lost out or left unemployed…

JONES: Yeah.

KING: …and white America provided the good press, the constant good media image nationally, and that helped to be on national TV and national press. And fairly good media image locally. I think the State Sovereignty

Commission supported and encouraged Evers as the leader and white America has always picked leaders for Blacks. What we had symbolically…this would be a good stopping point…is that, at the Atlantic City convention, the Freedom Democratic Party turned down the two seat compromise, the chief reason being you will not let the delegates from Mississippi vote on who the two would be. It was not that the Freedom Democratic Party would not accept just two delegates. Of course, we were angry about just two seats.

JONES: You and Dr. Henry

KING: But the program pushed by Johnson and Humphrey and imposed on the convention by Walter Mondale who lead the secret committee and lied to people that this was acceptable to the Freedom Democratic Party and barred the door to our attorney who was a member of the committee well, of the credentials committee. Mondale was really heading the secret meetings of a subcommittee set up to control the Freedom Democratic Party. Anyway, the problem was that black people had never been allowed to have their own leaders. Their leaders had been murdered or discredited or run away for years. We were only a year after Medgar Evers, who had been a locally accepted leader produced by the people, a Mississippian. He may…he vol…he wanted to work with the NAACP. He was on their salary, but he built the NAACP up in the state. And when the mass movement came, it really called forth Medgar as a different kind of leader just as the mass movement in Montgomery called forth a young minister, Dr. King. This they saw, the people…the Blacks at the convention and the Whites who supported them, saw as the heart of the issue. We're at the heart of America. We're at the Democratic Convention in the midst of the best the liberals have to offer, and what they offer is that they will continue to tell Blacks who your leaders are and who Whites will speak with for you. We were not allowed to choose it. Therefore, the Freedom Democratic Party had to be smashed and destroyed because white America has never let black America produce its own leadership. I say had to be. I look back. I see the fight. We were redbaited. We had support from some minor Reds. Malcolm X saw the Freedom Democratic Party's struggle for integrity, even though it was nonviolent, as something he could support because the [stand] of black leadership. He said, "You're crazy if you think you can get anywhere in the Democratic Party and in the system but nevertheless not having compromised your rule principles, maybe you can." And Malcolm X basically was saying two things. Maybe you can show me that you can work politically in the American system and maybe you can show me that this Christian, nonviolence, love and suffering has something to it, because you people…and then also the third thing that Malcolm said was I have never trusted white people until what went on in the '64 Summer in Mississippi and now, I am beginning to think there are some white people who might be able to work with some Blacks. An irony! We realized that

SNCC and people then had to move the other direction. Although even there, I think that what they said was in the future maybe when America has changed.

JONES: Right.

KING: Ok, so there's the issue of the imposition of leadership. And what we have in Mississippi is a struggle for several years until the FDP is finally weakened, and the Loyalist Democrats are put forward as the federal program to destroy the movement in Mississippi led very cynically by Hodding Carter. I think the only person who's done more harm to Blacks in Mississippi than Aaron Henry is Hodding Carter, not Aaron than Charles Evers, is Hodding Carter, who's certainly more intelligent than Charles Evers. Both of them thinking that what they were doing was the only thing that could be done, and both of them benefiting immensely personally by taking the leadership in fighting the Movement. But the thing that had to be done was a black leader had to be given to Mississippi. The one leader produced, Medgar, had been murdered. The next attempt would have centered around Mrs. Hamer as another kind of person put forward and Aaron, produced by the people, but Aaron in touch with the people. Aaron had to be split away from the people. Aaron was ordered by the national NAACP to break his ties with the Freedom Democratic Party within a week after the Atlantic City convention and was courted by the regular Democrats from that point on. And Charles Evers was put forward as the leader. The Loyalist Democrats could never have done anything with Hodding Carter had they not had Evers to get the [inaudible] people out to mass meetings. But Evers was given immense money. His corruption was tolerated, because it gave these people who had no grassroots movement a name and a symbol. Once they had poverty money that they could use to tell people, members of the Freedom Democratic Party, people who work with SNCC, will not get jobs in Headstart. People who cooperate with the NAACP and the Loyalist Democrats will get jobs. They then had the money and the power to build a new black movement in the state on the grounds of the one that was being wiped out. But it was a movement that would meander and eventually be controlled not by the brightest and the best in the White House like the Kennedy and the Johnson liberals, but eventually by the brightest and best in Mississippi like Cliff Finch. Or, even today, William Winter could get away with telling Blacks we won't even let Aaron Henry be co-chairman of the Democratic Party and got away with it for what he considers to be good. I don't fault William Winter. He doesn't pretend to be saying that he's doing that for the good of Blacks except they were told that the Democratic Party is for your good. And now, we're back to a point of saying trust the best white liberal leadership. It is. I think Winter's the best we've ever had. He's just not a black leader. That's not his problem. That's the Black's problem. I mean, if they take it, then he'll do the best he can.

JONES: Ok. That's fascinating.

[Break in tape]

JONES: Roll 'em. Ok. We're back after lunch. So, kind of getting back to Jackson in a roundabout way so after the death of Medgar Evers, there wasn't ever a leader you would have thought [inaudible]. There wasn't ever a leader to step forward to, you know, that had a strong voice, because most of the…most of the people in the Jackson movement…most of the people who had been in jail were high school students who weren't really capable of leading themselves in a [inaudible]

KING: Some of the [ministers] could have given leadership. Mrs. Allison had been the leader, but Mrs. Allison was not trusted by the national NAACP [inaudible]. One who could have given leadership and did not was R. L. T. Smith. I don't know why. He sided with the conservative side though. Very, very much so. And [inaudible] like he didn't know what was going on, and I don't know whether he just was "Good old guy" above it all, or whether he really did understand. At the time, I thought he was a sweet, old man who didn't understand and did not want to understand. I think that was prejudiced on my part, trying to make him more of a senior citizen than he was at that time. He probably did understand what was going on and, for his own reasons, perhaps fear of more violence, troubles, things like this, really worked to cool things. Well, that school bus [inaudible] business.

JONES: Yeah, I wonder why they're getting out of school at 1:15.

KING: [inaudible] Maybe some teacher's meeting [inaudible]

JONES: Yeah.

KING: I expect to see school buses at 3 o'clock [inaudible].

JONES: When I talked with John and I talked with R. L. T. Smith, it seems like he intimated that his disciple was…that Charles Evers was his disciple and that their heads were together on a lot of the major issues

KING: Well, they certainly were, and R. L. T….R. L. T. was not trusted through the Winter and Spring and Summer of '64 by the SNCC people. And I probably misread what was going on. I thought they were overreacting. They had great expectations [inaudible] He didn't live up to the expectations, and I though that they just couldn't handle that. They thought that I was naïve and too much of a Christian minister and was refusing to see what was really going on in the world. And the truth is probably somewhere in between.

JONES: Well, as I said, I remember the first time that, one of the first trips we made out this way, I was saying that how much I had liked Reverend Smith and wondered why he hadn't taken more of a leading role in the Movement. He's an articulate kind of, you know, kind of charismatic grassroots leader. It seems like the Jackson Movement could have used…

KING: He certainly could have given leadership the same direction Medgar was giving it since Mrs. Allison wanted to keep going and others until some other younger leadership emerged if it was necessary to have that younger leadership. He might have been able to be the leadership himself. On the other hand, he's a very agreeable kind of person. He may not have agreed with all…he may not have liked everything Medgar was doing. He just went along with it out of that agreeable nature. As…when Charles was saying, "This is the way we do", he would do them. There are a lot of really good people in the NAACP who wanted to do what the leaders said, particularly the people around the state in chapters like in Carthage and Lee County and so on. And these people who could rally whenever Medgar called them out, then began to trust anything R. L. T. and Charles said and do it, and they felt a loyalty to Medgar meant obeying Charles.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: Maybe R. L. T. was in that [inaudible], but he was also one of those calling people out. But the leadership didn't emerge. It could have come out of the developing voter registration movement. Even that was squelched once it became obvious that large numbers of people would get involved in it. I think at one point the city even closed down voter registration. Just closed the office for a couple of weeks or something like that. We had, you know, some legal pressure and federal government pressure and got it reopened, but the momentum of something like the registration drive is easy to break and, if you have the fear factor thrown in, you've got to have large numbers of people doing things. Visible numbers, not large numbers, but visible numbers. By late in the summer, the focus was on the march on D.C.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: So people began to have something outside that everybody could go and focus together around.

JONES: Did you go to D. C.?

KING: Yes. [inaudible] wonderful occasion.

JONES: Who did you go with? How did you…tell me something about that experience. I haven't talked with anybody who went to D. C.

KING: Well, the people that worked on the Jackson Movement like, I think Joyce Ladner was one up there working in the offices helping. Joan Trumpauer was working through the summer up there. People kind of scattered once there was really no strong movement in Jackson. And we weren't going to take the initiative to try to build it up if that meant having to criticize Charles Evers.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: [inaudible]. So the poor people went to [inaudible] parish. They had been working with CORE in Jackson and Madison County. And then, things were going in the Delta. The elections were on that summer, legislature and governor.

JONES: Right.

KING: So that helped people keep attention focused on voter registration, although there was no particularly attractive candidates. J. P. Coleman was running.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: And proved thoroughly that any accusation that he was a moderate or decent was wrong.

JONES: Alright.

KING: And the…I would think that campaign was probably one of the lowest in the state.

JONES: Stand tall with Paul.

KING: Well, you expected Paul to say that…

JONES: Yeah.

KING: …even though his own history was not an extremist on the race thing. But that was an obvious way to win, and Coleman went around basically attacking from the far right the Barnett administration for having lost the battle at Ole Miss.

JONES: Calling for the tapes.

KING: And his using things…saying things like, "I kept that nigger Medgar Evers in his place when I was governor." Which would have been all right had that nigger Medgar Evers not just been buried a month earlier. If he'd been alive, it would have been tolerable. Vague references by Coleman to

bragging about keeping the University of Southern Mississippi and Oxford segregated when he was governor. Clyde Kennard was the reference point. I don't think he used Kennard's name. Kennard was dying of cancer at the time. I still thought that Coleman was a moderate, decent human being, and it didn't bother me that he was a segregationist and racist. It bothered me later when he, once again, had power as a racist as a federal judge but at that point I didn't expect anybody to be running for governor of Mississippi who wasn't. And it really bothered me that a man like Coleman would have to be so vile personally and stoop so low. And that he could do that.

JONES: Right. Right.

KING: And convinced me that, you know, I didn't need convincing by that point, but it reinforced the feeling that we didn't have enough left as decent, white Mississippians. We didn't have enough decency left to save ourselves. And that help had to come from the outside and that change of any sort had to come from the black community. But that the outsiders really had to come in. I don't think Coleman ever realized that was [the morals] somebody was drawing from his campaign. But the black community is not particularly involved in the election other than disgust. [inaudible]

JONES: And it was during this time that Dr. Henry brought in Allard Lowenstein to begin planning the freedom vote?

KING: Well, we didn't call it the freedom vote at that stage. Al came in, must have been early July, maybe late June. And I'm not sure how Al came to Mississippi. The most…I assume Aaron invited him. And Al has never quite said…and there were times he could have said, and he didn't. So my hunch is that Aaron invited Dr. Henry to invite…I mean, Charles…Allard invited Dr. Henry to invite Allard. I don't know.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: Does Aaron say that he invited Al to come over at that point?

JONES: I've heard him say that. Yeah. And I have heard Al…Allard Lowenstein say that.

KING: Ok. Al…

JONES: Through the connections with the student associations.

KING: Yeah. I'm still not sure Aaron is to be sitting back and saying, "Who can help us?"

JONES: Right.

KING: Aaron would have called the national NAACP and his SCLC connections. I don't think [inaudible]. But Al came.

JONES: To Jackson?

KING: Yeah. I think he probably came to Jackson before he went up to Clarksdale. I'm not sure.

JONES: This is July of 1963?

KING: '63.

JONES: Ok. Medgar Evers has been dead a month. Yet, at the SNCC office in Jackson, there were people like Stokely Carmichael at that time?

KING: Yeah.

JONES: At the SNCC office in Jackson? But the SNCC office in Jackson was just a coordinating thing. The COFO office really…it wasn't…

KING: Yeah, it's not doing anything in Jackson.

JONES: It's not doing anything in Jackson.

KING: It's not trying to pick up any of the pieces. If called upon to help they would but they would not take any initiative in any of the local Jackson things.

JONES: And you…Is that when you gravitated towards SNCC? Following Medgar's death and the inactivity in Jackson? Did you just…

KING: Well, I certainly knew the divisions well by that time. I have always considered myself on the SNCC side of things [inaudible]. What we did in Jackson was the SNCC style having been lead by the [inaudible] and Tougaloo students, who interacted constantly with SNCC and called themselves NAACP Youth Chapter at Tougaloo, but considered themselves to be the SNCC chapter on campus and saw no problem using both names.

JONES: Sure.

KING: They knew well enough, if they were around Gloster Current or somebody from the national NAACP, to blabber as if the NAACP deserves the credit. It took them a long time to learn that the national people would think that meant blame, criticism. But they thought of themselves as SNCC. The SNCC people visited the campus in and out. So did the CORE people. So

I…I never thought of my work in Mississippi as not being with SNCC and CORE. And by extension, SCLC. The COFO concept I liked very much. What SCLC was doing, generally, was taking the leaders, new leaders that would be found, like a Mrs. Hamer or Mrs. [inaudible], and people would be taken to Tennessee or to Georgia for training, adult education extensive workshops on how to do voter registration, how to do all kinds of things, that SCLC was running. SCLC never had many staff here, but we knew we could use all those resources of SCLC. The public SCLC of Martin King and Ralph Abernathy marching was the one that we were not able to use. I began to leave NAACP slowly through the Fall of '63 and Spring of '64, because I thought that I don't have enough energies for a losing battle and this organization is almost dead and deserves to be. And the people who are in it, the good people and the good chapters, are already active in COFO, and SNCC doesn't care that much about getting credit. It's not legal to make people change their names. At that point, SNCC was really caring more about getting things done. And I just decided I would put my energies and work into where things were being accomplished. I never even talked to the SNCC people that critically about what had gone on with the NAACP in Jackson.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: And the movement here was over. There were other things to be done. It was clear that people around the state were ready for things and I hoped that things would pick up [inaudible] in Jackson. I certainly continued to go to meetings once or twice a week. Grew to despise the Medgar Evers Youth Choir, because I thought that some of those kids ought to be able to see through it.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: But that was kind of unfair of me. Mrs. Allison was still thinking that the youth choir would be a wonderful thing and like the night that they did march, they would be ready to march anytime something was really clear and was needed. The reports I got a year or so later after I had…there's another yard.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: Not quite the same. It's got plastic added to the yard, but it's the same idea. Within a few years, maybe late '60's, I heard that Charles Evers had been given $25,000 to stop demonstrations in Jackson to guarantee that there would be no direct action. Anything else could be done, but no direct action movements. So the boycott continued, the boycott of white merchants, which was really going fairly well. Charles Evers was given national press as leading a successful boycott. It was the one that had been built up, you

know, for a year. He began to benefit personally whether he got the 25,000 or not, and I think he did. That was some mon…supposedly money raised from white Mississippians. Maybe it was 2500, who knows? Maybe it wasn't anything. I think the pressure from the federal government to stop demonstrations would have been sufficient. Later I was hearing and I cannot prove it, that he was supposed to stop SNCC from getting going in Jackson, supposed to prevent the Freedom Democratic Party from doing things in Jackson. He certainly functioned that way. But by that time he is fighting to establish himself as a leader of something and is fighting the movement and trying to pick up other people who are against the movement, but who want to be for black progress. So that I'm not sure he ever had to be bribed or threatened. And I didn't want to take the time to get to the bottom of those stories. The end result was the same. The people who told me that were closer to the whole…to the whole scene. They certainly were not trying to spread gossip. If anything, I was once told that even in warning. I slipped up once and tried to tell something like this in warning to Hodding Carter about some of the corruption with Evers, the personal corruption. I didn't get remotely near the levels of the bribes and all of this. At a time, I was hoping that the Loyalist Democrats could be honestly merged and bring in some Whites. There were some Whites in the state who were sympathetic to the movement, Millsaps teachers and people like this, that we might really get something together. And I thought that Hodding was relying totally on Charles Evers as the new leader in the black community and did not want to be involved with others and once we got a coalition that even Hodding and those Whites could learn something from the whole [range] of Blacks. And you know, we could have a party that was a coalition. As long as the Blacks kept some militant political structure of their own, there was no reason you couldn't have a more moderate loyalist party.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: As long as Blacks had something political that they controlled. Hodding was not interested in anything like that, and Hodding went to Charles…this was '67 or '68, so way later…and Charles gave me hell. I didn't know what he was mad about and then, Aaron gave me hell for having talked to Hodding. And Aaron never said that he knew that the things that I had implied about corruption were wrong or false, but Aaron was very upset. It was like I was a traitor that I had talked to Hodding. And I realized Hodding, you know, actually went to very trustworthy people to find out about it. I assume that Hodding was intelligent and did find out that Evers was corrupt, and Evers was helping put Hodding Carter on the map, so it didn't matter. Speaking of Hodding, I guess he got on the map through the newspaper and his father's name. John Salter and I, particularly me, had a lot of trouble with white moderates during the summer of '63. I had been able to approach people at Millsaps fairly well in the preceding six months

and still had a lot of contacts with white church people in Jackson. The Jackson Movement really happened fairly fast once it hit the kind of public stage of open demonstrations, but, even throughout that, I maintained contacts with both college and church people. Everyone in the white community needed to believe that outside agitators were stirring up local Blacks. The Clarion-Ledger Daily News on the Sunday after the funeral…and the funeral riot after the funeral…said that the riot was led by two white men teachers at Tougaloo. Many people in the black community thought that. Even R. L. T. thought that and sort of apologized later for thinking that. That's certainly the story that I have heard that the Justice Department people were spreading, that Salter and King were extreme radicals and had come very close to saying communists.

JONES: Right.

KING: That the implication was that we had sort of organized the riot, knew how to trigger it and set people off. That sort of thing. That was bad enough in the papers. We were arrested, which makes it look like, especially if you were a moderate, you know, nice middle-class white person, people get arrested for doing something. We were arrested, which fed the image. And then, an article appeared in the Sunday New York Times Magazine, written by Hodding Carter, Jr. [inaudible] telling the nation and the world that there were troubles in Mississippi, but it was the two white teachers at Tougaloo who stirred up the Jackson people to riot, and the New York Times printed it. Both cases, the Clarion-Ledger and the Times did not use our names, but that caused trouble for me even within the National Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches, people back at Cambridge in Boston where church connections [inaudible] seminary connections in Boston and so on. People, at their most tolerant, were willing to say, "Maybe Ed King snapped. He did believe in nonviolence. Maybe, after the death of his friend, maybe he really did lead a riot." Nobody was willing to question the liberal reputation of Hodding Carter and the New York Times by the time they printed it. I happen to think that the Times editors like everybody else, good Whites. And the idea that Blacks could have their own leaders is something white America doesn't tolerate. So it fit but it really began to fit, and then, I belonged to pacifist organizations, some of which were easy to red-bait. And John Salter belonged to fairly radical left-wing labor union movements and things like this. Fairly vehemently anti-communist for their own reasons. But they would defend any labor union people who were communist. But both of us would have been related to groups who had fought the House on American Activities Committee and things like this. And so, it was very easy to put us into a mold of left-wingers stirring up the Blacks to violence. That was really hard to deal with.

JONES: [inaudible]

KING: And probably hurt in ways that we will never find out about.

JONES: Did you ever….you never had any dialogue with Hodding Carter before the [inaudible]

KING: [inaudible] No.

JONES: Or Hodding Carter, III until ’67, ‘68

KING: No. I guess I began dealing with Hodding, III, oh, ’64 or ‘5, yeah. And dealing and fighting and trying to find ways to cooperate or work together, ‘cause Lord knows, there was enough that needed to be done.

JONES: Hum. What about your friends at Tougaloo? People like Dr. Beittel and Dr. Borinski following the New York Times article?

KING: Oh no. They [knew] what was going on. Borinski was out of the country…

JONES: Was he?

KING: …at that time. He had taken a trip to Europe that summer. And you know, Beittel, these people knew exactly what was going on.

JONES: Yeah, right.

KING: That was no [inaudible]. Attempts to work with Charles again, and I think I made more efforts to work with him and then later, to try to work from a movement side with the coalition of Charles Evers and Aaron Henry on the NAA side and Hodding Carter and Pat [Berian] and that whole Loyalist Democratic poverty game.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: Because I always saw these people as being part of alliances that we needed.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: And I thought that the black movement was strong enough that it could maintain its integrity and you know, it could work in broader groups. But I really made lots of efforts to work with Charles. He confided in me many times, like these discussions about nonviolence where it was clear he didn’t know. And I did a lot of work for him. You will edit this judiciously.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: Certainly Charles knew that if he needed help on something and other people were going to help him, then I would come help him, too. So I helped build him up. His campaign for Congress, I was thoroughly opposed to. He tricked us. Got the campaign going. He was not a candidate wanted or needed but once he wanted to run and set the thing up and announced [inaudible] Ed King, I want you to help [inaudible] need help with a meeting, where he had himself drafted, we did. [inaudible] was his campaign manager in '68, and I was…I don't know what the title was sort of like assistant campaign manager, but I was really the key strategist in planning it…and Charles knows that, when he needed me to help him, if it was a project I could agree with, I could do a lot of good service. In this case, getting maximum exposure for a black candidate to see what the black vote could do was important, and, if people voted for an image of what they thought Charles Evers was, that was important. Some of us said, "My God, this will even make you bigger", but he wanted to do it. He wanted to do it for his own reasons. But he knows how much I worked [on it]. He's done things, said things, in front of me in later years…and we'll get around to some of this. He's given me his philosophy several times down in Natchez and Fayette. I used to go visit him there. I think he went there because SNCC and FDP had already opened up a closed territory to voter registration. He said that this was a place Blacks could win office. He was willing to help me get elected to office if I would go in as a lieutenant, or he advised me to do something like move into Yazoo County, or someplace like that, where there was a big enough black vote that I could really win. I don't think he could ever understand movement people who got their own rewards…

JONES: Yeah.

KING: …in other ways.

JONES: Right.

KING: [inaudible] probably just as selfishly and greedily. We just wanted some other [kind] of reward. Morally, there may be no difference. I think everybody needs rewards, but there's a bit of a difference morally in a social sense when he went out and [inaudible] so much for himself, and many other movement leaders didn't. Anyway, he did talk, did confide in me for years. His philosophy was to push, to pop the whip, and he…have I told you that one?

JONES: No.

KING: That is his word.

JONES: Pop the whip?

KING: Pop the whip. And I would say, "Pop the whip?" like, my God, you didn't say that. [Would] you tell me what you mean? I think I know what you mean. It meant exactly that. He would say, "Ed, you've been around these people. You know what my people are like. They grew up on plantations. That is the only thing they've ever understood is popping the whip. And it's time a black man popped the whip and got these people to do what they need to do." At least he had the idea that a Black should pop the whip instead of a White, but no model of any possibility of [life] other than what white Mississippi, as elaborated by Chicago politics of underworld and the Democratic Party. That's the model of Charles Evers. Bilbo and [Dailey] with a little Al Capone thrown in. And the federal government having to look aside, because they all voted democratic. Several times, and once even with another minister friend with me who had been involved with the movement in another state, and Charles relaxed enough and knew me and relaxed enough to even say it so I even had one witness about the pop the whip stories. But he did pop the whip. He organized gangs of violence and brutality in the black community to intimidate people who disagreed with him, or with the Loyalist Democratic Party, the way the Klan was trying to attack people who were the freedom democrats.

JONES: [Why?]

KING: Because it worked. He organized [inaudible] of violence in his boycotts, and the New York Times and in Jackson…

JONES: And in Jackson.

KING: The New York Times was going along with the "Discredit Martin King. Push the new black leader." And I think Charles was being pushed and groomed by the powers that be. The New York Times was even saying he has run more successful boycotts than Martin Luther King. Nobody has had such a high level of participation. Sure. It was easy. As early as Christmas of '63, he wanted the boycott in Jackson to be especially successful, and he told me how he had gotten some of the high school students who remember six months earlier had been carried in garbage trucks to prison…

JONES: Right.

KING: …which was either a mark of shame or something of great pride, and I think it's a matter of pride that they stood up that much. He got high school students to go around and rip grocery bags and shopping bags from women who broke the boycott and shopped. And if you couldn't take the bag away and throw their stuff on the street, then you sneaked up behind them and ripped it. And he was having trouble. During Christmas, he didn't have enough, and he asked me to get some Tougaloo College students to help

him with that and with breaking out windows of homes of black folks who were not so much for direct action. There was plenty of direct action. This was for Blacks who were against the Movement, who were not supporting the boycotts. I told him the students didn't do that, but I didn't really still fight him and challenge him over it just moderately saying that's not nonviolence. And he would brag, my people never get caught. They didn't. There, at that Christmas time, or sometime in that…around that December, someone had set a trap and tried to kill me and Jeanette. They caught the wrong white teacher.

JONES: I never heard of that. At your home?

KING: Well, this was another white teacher. He had been at my house, left my house to drive into Jackson, and a roadblock was set up on North State Street. Including several cars which were recognizable, everything from a Cadillac to a VW, but cars on both sides of the road. And a teacher's car was attacked. They were driven off the road. People came at them with clubs. And Pat…Pat Hutchison had a baby which was about six months old…eight months old at that point, you know, big enough to be visible. Grabbed the baby, held the baby to her breast. Her husband locked, tried to maneuver and get away. And the people were so startled at seeing the baby that they let him…I think his car was hit…let him maneuver and I think she ran driving right towards the Cadillac. Find a shady place. And then I got a call within five minutes and saying, "We're going to kill you next time, and we're going to kill your wife, and you better tell your wife to leave the baby at home next time." I didn't tell them you know, they had the wrong car. I was going to leave that up to God. I didn't tell them they'd gotten the wrong person. We told that to Evers, and Evers said, "Well, it's time for us to kill some of them." Which he meant. And so, he suggested that I go out again and say something to them if they called, some way to really rile them. But that he would get an armed squad of black men, and the armed squads had men organized to protect Medgar Evers' house, to protect Charles Evers' house, and so on. And even some people who believed in nonviolence would still say you could defend your home. Charles had that kind of a squad. He was able to be that kind of a leader. And he wanted to put his men in the woods near the campus and have cars ready near the campus gates and let me go out. And the gate was watched by police always or Sovereignty Commission. Probably FBI. We didn't think there were FBI then. We think so now. But our movements…when they knew when we were moving…but it would have been very easy for us to notice when somebody was following us or a second car. And that was my relationship with Charles. He wanted to help kill the people who were trying to kill me. Nonviolently, of course, so that none of his people would suffer. I had reports much, much later after the poverty wars and the Democratic Party things got so intense by the…well, by the time of the convention, along in there, by the end of '68 even though I worked for him on his campaign…I

had reports that Charles Evers was trying to kill me...now, don't put that in…from somebody who I trust who was with him, but who broke with him, so would have had reasons to say bad things about Charles, but no reason to bring up this.

JONES: Good Lord.

KING: And it was described in Chicago style to have an enemy wiped out.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: That's another one I've never wanted to get to the bottom of. What little I got though, made me think that this may not be Charles Evers's idea. I'll bet this is the federal government.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: But I didn't tell the guy who told me about Charles' earlier thing that he would you know, knew how to set up a trap, and we would kill some Klansmen or whoever they were. It was you know, B-grade movie gangster style stuff. It was not totally inconceivable. It is now when I'm saying it out loud. I don't believe it, and I'm not sure that I'm not making it up. But I'm not. But there would have been no reason for that just because of any enmity between us. And, later, we've been somewhat friends again.

JONES: Right.

KING: I was in India when he ran for governor with the Gandhi…Gandhians there…so I wasn't involved in that campaign. One thing I heard about Charles on that campaign was how surprised he was when he couldn't get an interracial ticket. Because Henry and I had had an interracial ticket four year or eight years earlier, I guess. And he couldn't get anyone to run for lieutenant governor with him that time. I don't think it was because [inaudible]

[break in tape]

JONES: I'm kind of worried about my batteries.

KING: Can you plug into here? Do you have a…

JONES: No, I don't have one of those attachments, but I think…I think it's going to pick up alright.

KING: I've got one of those gadgets.

JONES: I just need to keep my eye on it to make sure that it doesn't stop. Well, we've king of drifted around [inaudible].

KING: What happened when the Jackson movement went down.

JONES: Right.

KING: And Charles Evers was offering a different style. Maybe a style of leadership, but certainly it was a different style than Medgar had. But he was not that strong. He did not have a major following anywhere. He had respect and loyalty because of his brother. Then, once President Kennedy was dead, Charles talked about that death over and over and over in his meetings and about how close he had been to President Kennedy. And I don't think that he was, but I think he was invited to the White House during the week of Medgar's funeral. But I think he really was a close associate of Bobby Kennedy's, and the bond that each of them had having had a brother killed probably was a factor there. Whatever the factors, Charles could drop Kennedy names as well as his brother's name.

JONES: Yeah, probably…which made him a powerful…

KING: Well, it certainly gave him an opening. He still had to prove himself, we thought. In Jackson, he did some things that established himself as having a stake in the community. He made financial investments. He usually personally profited if there was a boycott. It was not just that the people could not buy from certain white merchants, but they would end up buying from him here in Jackson. I think he had some grocery stores that he owned or had a controlling interest in listed in the names of other people and in southwest Mississippi, I think there were some liquor dealings going on that he had in someone else's name, but it was really his. The SNCC people were appalled at that. I was. What we couldn't see was that, in a sociological sense, no matter how corrupt it was, he was saying, "I am here. I'm putting my roots, my rotten, corrupt, thieving roots, into this community. I've got a real stake in what comes out." And over and over he said, in criticism of SNCC, " These are just fly-by-night kids. Don't trust those kids. Don't trust those kids. They're going to be gone tomorrow. Back to Atlanta, back to college." And in a movement which had depended upon youth for a lot of its leadership, not for all of it, but for a lot of it, and when you didn't have the second level of a Medgar or Martin King to turn to…I mean, Martin King could never have organized anything at the community level. He had to have the youth out there doing all of the hard work, but he could be the charismatic person to pick up on it, and it was a good relationship. Some tensions, but it was basically, a good one. Charles was right. I looked at the world and I thought that the SNCC people are here to stay. Charles was saying you can't trust young people. By owning a grocery store, he showed something that people could understand in a way that the

idealism or even the dedication. I come to you know, give my life to you. Put myself here. If you don't own anything, if you don't have land, if you're not doing something that other people aspire to, just being an organizer is bound to leave some confusion. People start thinking. Do I cast my lot with you, even though I agree with you, or do I cast my lot with the more permanent ones? So his very [inaudible] corruption actually helped [inaudible] organizing.

JONES: Do you think his message has been…has been proven right over the years? He's still saying the same things, telling black people to own something.

KING: Many people are saying that now. I've always thought that was right. I don't think in quite the [inaudible] sense he means. I think people need a feeling of ownership, of land, of a belonging, and of the kind of security that gives. It's a false security, because you can still be shop in your own home like Medgar was, but it is something that the black community needs. Any community needs, but particularly the black community. I don't think there's much deep philosophy in what he's saying about it. He just wants to keep the black money in the black community. Well, so there's that tension going on in Jackson and still troubles at developing a local movement. In the summer of '63 with the elections, SNCC decided to use the elections to dramatize the fact that Blacks couldn't vote and wanted to. And in Coahoma County, Aaron ran for sheriff along with several other black candidates for local offices. It wasn't quite a freedom vote ballot, but it was approaching it. People working with SNCC lost students who were here in the summer led by Bill Higgs out of Washington. Found stuff in the law that really developed into the Freedom Democratic Party idea. And Lowenstein was coming on the scene at the same time and able to focus it and seize and just see you know, immense possibility in a idea that we saw for two steps he saw as [inaudible]. And people said, "That's going to take you backwards." And we knew it was going to take us forward a little ways. And he could just excite us and see everything in it. And, in many ways, Lowenstein sort of should be called the father of the…the FDP idea and certainly the Freedom Summer idea. But there were other people with similar ideas just not as focused. And the work that came out, I could Bill Higgs name to it, but there could well have been some young black law student working with SNCC who found stuff and then asked Higgs, "Hey, you're from Mississippi. What does this mean?" Somewhere out of the Delta project came the idea of voting a challenged ballot, and this is valid under Mississippi law. The purpose being as I moved two years ago from one precinct in Jackson to another, had my registration changed, if I went to vote in my new precinct, I was still listed in the old precinct and I had moved not across the city but across the county and couldn't get there, there'd been a real mistake, the law said if for any reason you feel you are entitled to vote and some mistake was made in your registration or your voting records, then you shall be allowed to vote. Well…

JONES: Out of gas?

KING: I was going to get gas in Philadelphia. We talked. I think I'm out of gas. [inaudible] Let me see if I can pull into that gravel spot.

JONES: Better [inaudible] in neutral.

KING: What did we do in Philadelphia? I had three successful…four meetings. I saw four people that I needed to see.

[break in tape]

JONES: You know, the last time we were talking about…we ended up again talking about Charles Evers and it's strange…it's strange how the two of….wasn't it that….the SNCC people and Charles Evers conceived of the move in completely different ways. Was it…was Charles Evers not talking about or were the SNCC people, by 1963, talking about a radical transformation of society because Charles Evers was talking about getting yours…getting your piece of the pie?

KING: That's what Charles was talking about, and he never had any inkling that SNCC would move in a truly radical direction or begin to drift to the political left as it did. The ideals were very different. Charles certainly believed in the trickle down theory. Had he…I don't know what he wanted for the masses. As late as spring of '65, summer…on in to early summer…I had to convince him to keep his mouth shut about the Voting Rights Act which Lyndon Johnson had proposed and congress was about to pass, Mr. Evers was against.

JONES: For what reason?

KING: He didn't think illiterates should be allowed to vote, and thought it was a mistake and made the black community look bad to even be advocating letting uneducated people vote.

JONES: The question is "is he literate"?

KING: Sure.

JONES: Is he?

KING: To say you know, enough to operate in the world as a sharp operator. He would have accepted something like an eighth, 10th, 12th grade cut off. There had to be something. He did not like the idea of voter registrars. He thought that what we had to fight for was to make the tests in Mississippi

fair. His line was the line of any of my white relatives in places like Vicksburg who are decent, moderate people who always felt bad if there were places in Mississippi that didn't let quality coloreds vote. Some of my family thought that anybody who had an education and property like [inaudible] should be allowed to vote. And Charles Evers though the same thing. He was a property owner. He was subject to taxation without representation. He didn't give a damn about masses of black people. He had succeeded and made it, and there was something wrong with a society which wouldn't let black people like himself who had money and had their money taxed and had no representation. So he needed to vote, and his class of people needed to vote and did not want all Blacks treated like masses. And he was about to go public with that kind of stuff. Here again, if the Sovereignty Commission had offered him $5,000 to speak against the Voting Rights Act, he might have taken their money and laughed and given a speech he'd already written without even their suggesting it. By that point, it wasn't even a matter of the federal government in Washington controlling him. He was so conservative in his basic approach that the Johnson administration was way beyond [him]. He couldn't understand Martin King and why King was asking for all this. Why not ask for what you can get? But also, why do you want so much? In the summer of '65, must have, yeah, in the summer of '65, the young Democrats had a meeting where he brought in loads of people, particularly down from Natchez, in that area, of young people. By that time, they're two years away from a lot of the heavy SNCC contact, or they're a year away from a lot of the heavy SNCC contact, and they're idealists and they're naïve. So they believed that Evers is part of the same movement, and they would vote as a block anyway he wanted. What he told them to do was what Hodding Carter told them to do. And they were lined up. And some of Hodding's Whites from Mississippi State and a few places in a coalition with Evers voting against Millsaps and Tougaloo to set up the Young Democrats with two senior citizens, Hodding Carter and Charles Evers, as the leaders. One of them was 38 and the other one, wasn't but 39 I think, and I believe Evers was even older than that. They became the leaders. Anyway, at that particular meeting where I had done one of my unusual things, we had worked out a compromise slate of officers shared between the FDP Blacks, who had 90 percent of the people of the state who were interested in the Young Democrats and had applied for a charter from the national Young Democrats having been turned down in '64 even though there was no Young Democrats in Mississippi. The national party refused…refused to accept an all-black group. The all-black group then said it was [inaudible] the Whites and Millsaps students said they would work with them and would be willing knowing why there were you know, no Whites interested in the Young Democratic party. At that point, the national part got Hodding Carter and others to come in and work with Evers to organize a Young Democrats, which was controlled by Whites whose membership was still overwhelmingly black, but it was NAACP youth choir type Blacks who thought they were fighting the battle

for civil rights when they would cheer and boo at SNCC people or me or others who didn't get along with Carter and Evers and thought that we were the enemy. And I guess I though that they were the enemy. Early on, in that particular session that morning, I had a talk with Evers…some…I think that morning…sometime during that time…and the Watts Riots had started in California and Evers was still telling me what he thought and certainly not trying to get me on his side at that time [inaudible] giving some of the politics. They reneged on the deal. The chairman, the presiding officer of the convention, was to have been a faculty member from Millsaps which I had taken a little trouble. It was a little difficult to sell to SNCC and the FDP, but FDP and SNCC people [bought] it if that would help. Since the Millsaps students were willing to work with Tougaloo students, why not let a white teacher from Millsaps have the chair to make sure that everything was fair. We also had an agreement that the election of other officers would not come until the afternoon session, because it was summer school and many of the students had exams. I think it was the end of the first session or something like that or some…anyway, I know that Tougaloo students had exams. I told the Tougaloo students and the Millsaps students, you do not have to come to the meeting, that we're just going to have speeches. We got there. The first order of business pushed by Hodding was to change the agenda to have the election of officers first and the speeches last in the afternoon and immediately moved to put in another naïve, young NAACP guy who happened to be a Tougaloo student, but was in thick with Charles, not with the Tougaloo student movement. He lived in Jackson but not on campus.

JONES: In place of your…

KING: A 20-year-old was put in place of this Millsaps political science professor. [inaudible] No, no. It was earlier [inaudible] Gordon Henderson, who was there, and publicly humiliated, had stuck his neck out to be willing to be there and had said he would take it only if he could be fair in his rulings through the day until we could [inaudible] to elect officers. And we had a slate of officer's ballots through everything that had been ironed out in several compromise meetings. They threw out the compromise, reneged on us, elected all but one officer of the whole Young Democrats, was from Hodding Carter and Charles Evers people, but it was Hodding and his Whites, like [Danny Cupit] who were winning on the basis of the black vote delivered by Charles Evers. In that context, Evers didn't try to buy me over to his side, so I think he was telling me the truth, not trying to impress me. About Watts he said, "What is wrong with the Governor of California? What is wrong with President Johnson? Why don't they have the National Guard out there? The only thing those kind of people understand in that kind of mob is machine guns. They should shoot them down." He meant it. He said it. I think he meant it. If he had been saying it to a white student from Millsaps, I would have said maybe he's trying to convince that person

to vote for his slate. None of that. I mean, and he was….that's where he was at that particular moment.

KING: Now, all of those people would have thought of him as their hero, no doubt.

JONES: Sounds like the most [inaudible].

KING: He [inaudible] Mississippi, and he is one of our most typical products. He has that apocryphal story, I think apocryphal, about how he and Medgar saw [Vardaman] or Bilbo. [inaudible] Bilbo.

JONES: Bilbo.

KING: I don't think that ever happened. Medgar never talked about it.

JONES: He likes to run those stories at you.

KING: But it's a wonderful story and I don't mind Mississippi having wonderful stories. And I've always thought that that meant if that ever happens, I'll be the next Bilbo. And he just sort of got tongue-tied when he said, "We'll vote him out" or whatever he says. What he really got out of seeing it was what the black world needs is a Bilbo, and I'll be it. Bilbo passed the mantle by saying, "See those two little black pickaninys over there? One day they'll try to vote." And there it was.

JONES: Well, let's get back to the SNCC office in Jackson. The activity around the summer of [inaudible]

KING: [inaudible] the shift and into the voting. The law was found by students working on the legal project with Bill Higgs. I think Marian Wright now, Marian Wright Edelman, was probably involved in that…

JONES: Excuse me, Bill Higgs was still in the state at this time?

KING: Yeah, he was in Washington, D. C. doing legal research for SNCC.

JONES: Ok. He had been run out in '61, 60…

KING: No, just before Jeanette and I got here in…in January of '63, he was run out. And we arrived, and the Methodist ministers, the 28 ministers had caught hell [inaudible]. Higgs got run out. There we were, sitting in Boston, trying to finish up graduate school a semester early to come back to Mississippi. Every few days, we heard of somebody else losing their pulpit, being run out of their church and then, poor Bill Higgs getting run out of the state. And we didn't think we'd last very long when we got here.

JONES: Did y'all know Bill Higgs before?

KING: We didn't really work with him. We knew his wife and her mother and father who were Mississippi progressives. And we'll leave names out of this, because they were in one town and moved to another town. But a very active church family, and the daughter was active in the movement out of Millsaps, as a number of Millsaps people were very early before Jeanette and I were. And she was arrested in a voter demonstration [inaudible] in a1960 demonstration. I think it might have had something to do with voting rights, or it may have been just a sit-in. But she was arrested in Memphis, I think. But in some kind of a protest there. And was kept reasonably quiet around Millsaps. But we, through that family, we met Bill, and they came to Boston. Now, he did some work at Harvard or Brandeis or something like that in about 1961. And by that time, we were so involved in our own school and lives we didn't really keep up with them. But I don't even think we saw them. We saw them several times in Mississippi, then they finally moved you know, closer by, and we didn't see them. And I guess he came on back here and they got…their marriage broke up along in there somewhere.

JONES: But he was in Washington [inaudible]

KING: But I always had immense respect for him, and it's just very scary to see what happened to Higgs and what happened to the Methodist ministers. Anyway, I didn't talk to Higgs that summer, but I was hearing from SNCC people that he was involved in this. And they found this obscure thing that you could go in and vote. So in Leflore County and in Clarksdale a lot of people went in and said, "Pardon me, ma'am, there's been a mistake. I'm sure that I'm qualified to vote. I have taken the test." And we tried a little of that here in Jackson with SNCC trying it here, but it didn't catch on here. A little of it tried in Madison County, but it didn't really catch there. I don't think it had anything to do with governor. I think in both places, I think Aaron was running for sheriff of Coahoma County. Although he may have…he may have used him for governor even there. And people were allowed to cast votes, and all the votes had to be put in an envelope and sealed, and all the election clerks…and I think about 2,000 people did this. And they had to pile up all of them and have an official ruling after the election was over and, as far as we know, not a single person was found qualified. But it was a beginning. Certainly energy going into raising money to send buses to Washington, that kind of thing, which I didn't get very involved in. There wasn't much I could do about it. SNCC was continuing to do things in the Delta. There were a few outsiders in the state. Al Lowenstein came in and out several times. But I found out later there was an NSA battle going on where Allard worked very strongly against SNCC. The NSA was trying to decide whether they would give some money to SNCC, something like that, or it may have just been some recognition

encourage student [inaudible] to help SNCC and that early Al tried to block it and maneuvering about who got elected to office was it the NSA? This kind of thing. And that early on Al tried to use his political connections and blocks against the movement for what he considered a better movement. A different way. But that early, he was working hard against SNCC. And SNCC was already in a desperate situation, because it had expanded and SNCC had suffered immensely in southwest Georgia as had SCLC in Jimmy Carter's backyard. That was where church burnings started.

JONES: Yeah, you told me that.

KING: Birmingham had church bombings, but that was sort of a spillover from the steel mills and all that atmosphere. It was just old-fashioned church burning that started in southwest Georgia. But large-scale arrests, weak-scale demonstrations with hundreds of people marching through the street and smashed. Federal government coming in on the wrong side. All that was going in southwest Georgia. It was really a big defeat for SNCC and for SCLC. In '62 and spilling over into '63, Greenwood, SNCC had tried to have a major voter registration drive. It had not worked. SNCC had failed massively in the state with getting people registered to vote by doing the things they had done for several years, workshops in churches where you tried to teach people how to fill out the form. You taught people something about constitutional history so they could answer the questions. Even if you thought the thing was phony, you still worked to make it work. And SNCC was…by the fall of '63, we looked at it. So some people must have looked at it during the summer. 95 percent of the people SNCC worked with were failing to pass the test. Those statistics have been used in national magazines to praise Charles Evers and attack SNCC. Massive attacks on SNCC saying SNCC never got anybody to register, but Charles Evers did. They would compare what Charles Evers did in the summer of '65 in Natchez. [inaudible] after the Voting Act with what SNCC had done for two years and say, "You see. This militancy doesn't work." And this is a year before…two years before Black Power.

JONES: Sure.

KING: SNCC was being attacked. SNCC was being attacked in national magazines like Life, major articles by Teddy White red-baiting SNCC as too militant long before people got into heavy militancy, because they were too uncontrollable. Anyway, people experimented with some direct action at the time of the election. Not a demonstration against the [inaudible] vote, not a picketing, but using it. Other people were organizing to take the several hundred people that we took from Mississippi to the march on Washington. During the summer, SNCC brought in a different kind of outsider for a kind of public act of defiance and had a folk music festival in a cotton field in Leflore County with Theodore Bikel and…

JONES: Bob Dylan?

KING: …Dylan. And SNCC singers, local people, and so on.

JONES: Were you there?

KING: Yeah.

JONES: When was it? In July of ’63?

KING: July. That was morale building. That was you know, support for the troops.

JONES: Was it busted up by the cops?

KING: No. It was audaciously done on somebody’s…some black person’s land. The cops cruised up and down outside it. A lot of Whites gathered. Hostile men gathered nearby, about a quarter of a mile away and watched and jeered. And several hundred Blacks came. And in the context it was a demonstration and it was a gathering and it was saying, “We will be out in the open. We are not afraid.” Even though we were, and we made sure it was over before dark, and we left and beat it back to Jackson. We had awful nightmares that night. James [Dembridge] rode back to Jackson with us and we talked Lillian Smith and southern history all the way from Greenwood to Jackson.

JONES: Who had contacted Dylan?

KING: SNCC.

JONES: The SNCC office in Jackson?

KING: Well, no. I would assume the Atlanta SNCC office must have arranged it. Bikel talked about his youth in Vienna as the Nazis were moving in. I think we [inaudible]. And it was an interracial group.

JONES: Was there any drinking beer or any of that kind of thing?

KING: No. Lord, no. My God, we wouldn’t have even thought of that. People may have that night, but nothing to give anybody an excuse to raid us. Ok, that was going on, but SNCC’s still building its contacts with people. Talk in SNCC through that summer of a nonviolent army, the talk about a nonviolent army meaning a disciplined group of people who could move about the nation, commit their lives and give an amount of time to working in a community and be trained for it in both nonviolent tactics and philosophy, but trained in practical skills of how to do voter registration

workshops or adult literacy, this kind of thing. Most of that summer was a kind of thinking and planning time. A lot of it though, was a time of deep despair, because everything that had been tried failed. And where the people were the most ready Jackson had been the biggest failure and the most suffering. And the federal government did not come through on its promises of support in Greenwood. Then word got out that the foundation money was going to be cut off to SNCC for voter registration on the grounds that it wasn't succeeding. The foundation money coming through the voter education project out of Atlanta, really coming through a coalition of foundations, liberals, money people in the East that the Kennedys helped get together to say they would channel money in if SNCC would go into voter registration. We think what they really meant was we don't want you wasting your time on voter registration in Mississippi. We want you to go to North Carolina and Georgia where you can register just enough Blacks to help Kennedy win the election in 1964. So we had to concentrate our resources. Some of us think that some of the voter registration foundation money was probably laundered money, probably CIA type money.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: We don't know that. Again, nobody wanted to know there were strings with it, but it's very probable that some of that money went through American…the American elite, upper-class, who were interested in this sort of thing that particular people from the Mellon family in Pittsburg, the Gulf Oil money. That certainly would have been enough money to tap, but strange, little things over the last 15 years indicated some odd connections. I'll look paranoid as hell, and I'm thinking, my God, if I say it, what will you think. If I don't think it, you'll think I'm as dishonest as can be. There's a string of murders including two people in the Mellon family investigated by people at very high levels…Cut this off., turn it off.

[break in tape]

KING: By the liberals. By the [inaudible]. Ok, ok [inaudible] Anyway, people that I believed thought this kind of mess was possible. The money was being cut off to Mississippi. By late summer, early fall things have…must be fall now…things are coming out in the open that the government, federal government, which had said they would support legal action, a voter registration drive in Greenwood, that they would not allow mass arrests and harassment They would protect the rights of black citizens and SNCC workers on a voter registration campaign. The government would not honor its commitments made to many people, not just SNCC, so that even people in the Southern Regional Council, Les Dunbar, people like that, know that the government backed down. Maybe the government felt now isn't the time, you know. But SNCC moved with a direct action campaign on voting in Leflore County thinking there would be federal support, and it was

withdrawn. Money was being withdrawn. Very soon, a key voting case was destroyed by the federal government, one of the key cases in Mississippi. And cases took years to go through the courts. One of the key cases had a panel of one Mississippi judge and two other southern judges. And pressure was brought through Eastland and company on Kennedy, Bobby and John, saying that they wanted a Mississippi panel. And Bob Moses could not believe it. I think I was the first one to hear that the federal government gave in and forced one of the other southern judges from the other southern states to resign from the panel to rig it so that we would lose. Inevitably, lose for the next two years…three years in court. Whereas, if we could have won at the first stage, district court stage…well, we might have won. It was voting. There was a good chance we would have won a two to one decision and not have even needed the Voting Rights Act. We were that close to a major breakthrough in court. It would not have been moving had we not had the direct action going. 'Cause nobody's going to make major rulings on earthshaking cases unless the earth is being shaken. You'll find someway not to go to the heart of the matter. The pressure was brought, and what we saw was, once again, the best friends we had in the federal government moving against the Movement. Even if they said we've got to do this because of the 1964 elections, this kind of thing, and they were saying that by the summer of '63. They were looking ahead to the next year's election. I think that early people were already beginning to say, "What if Goldwater is the nominee?" They would look back on the 1960 election which had been extremely close where the popular vote for Nixon was greater than the popular vote for Kennedy and where I think the Republicans won the 1960 election and where the Democrats stole it in Chicago and Texas. The Democrats had a great deal to be afraid of in '63 that the '64 election should have been on a very similar pattern. It should have been fought out in the East with the whole West going Republican be it Nixon, be it Goldwater, whoever. It was very reasonable to think at that [point] and look ahead and you know, most campaigns go that far so there…we didn't want to be [holding] the 1964 presidential election in July of 1963, but they don't want to be martyrs to any cause. So their cause is not immoral or obscene. It's just not…not very democratic if they want to control everything happening in the world and keep the lid on everything until after Kennedy can be reelected. I think we were close enough to them that I had justice department people over and over and over say that. They would agree with us that Hoover was bad. They….I heard one man as late as late September of '63 tell me, "Don't worry. John Kennedy is going to get rid of Hoover. You just want 'til January. Hoover will be out." Mr. Kennedy didn't live 'til January and you know, all those kind of things. We didn't like the world where everybody said don't do it now. In that sense, SNCC was still very young, but part of it was right. You cannot postpone and control everything and have this kind of perfect world that the intellectual elite thinks you can make through planning. And we had learned that in the fields. Everything we planned you know, something would happen anyway, and you had to be

free to swing with it. But free, swinging with the moment, was a more youthful thing anyway. Those pressures are on. SNCC is looking for something to do. The nonviolent army is being talked about with SNCC, with SCLC, with Vincent Harding type people. The march on Washington came about as a moderation of the original ideas for a massive civil disobedience campaign in Washington which was basically captured by the liberals and eventually turned into even cheers for Kennedy who hosted everybody at the White House. Very carefully, he invited them to the White House. He didn't go out and speak with us, but he got his picture with all of them when it worked, and, if it had gone bad, he would have looked a little bad, but not as a bad as…maybe. But it turned into a big, wonderful picnic that spread across the liberal [gambit] to make sure that the whole coalition…National Council of churches, Jewish leadership, labor union leadership…all of these folks stayed with it. It turned into a march for jobs and freedom. And I liked that. Some people thought that was washing…watering it down. It might have been, but in the long run, that was a more radical slogan to say that we're really talking about people's rights to jobs. Some people thought it was pulling resources away from local projects. I think in the aftermath most people felt that it really was a good thing.

JONES: Did Bob Moses agree with you?

KING: I don't know. I didn't…I saw Bob, maybe, once a week during that time.

JONES: Oh, I see. He was in Greenwood.

KING: He was in the Delta and out, and I couldn't travel very much. I was in an immense cast much of that time around my neck. I mean I could walk, but it looked ridiculous and melodramatic as hell.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: And it was very itchy and sweaty. So I didn't like going in the Delta too much anyway. Getting too far away from the air-conditioning. Anyway, people looked at this nonviolent army idea of large scale things, ways to involve lots of people, because the feeling, gut feeling, we were getting was that large numbers of people are ready, but we need a disciplined cadre. Gandhi had had a disciplined cadre. He had a number of disciplined groups after he had worked 20 years in India. By that time, there were large numbers of people he could call on all over the country who knew the tactics, who could control mobs and keep them disciplined and keep them from turning into rock-throwing kind of mobs that went through the cities and all of that. We felt…we didn't really feel that the city riots would occur, but we felt if we don't give some leadership to this in a disciplined way, something might happen. We certainly didn't have that kind of intelligence

and insight. But still got a feeling that we've got to really organize something really disciplined ourselves. Part of it was also romantic to talk of a big scale type of thing. At the march, the tensions came back. Probably the great ironies about the march was that the NAACP, which had always opposed demonstrations, got so much credit maybe. It may have been deliberate. Roy Wilkins' picture is on Time magazine at the time of the march with great play-up about the NAACP, the oldest civil rights organization, what wonderful things it's done. This is at a time that even Jet magazine in June and July is saying, "All over America people are seeing and questioning the NAACP, because of its failures in Jackson, because it gave up, because it [dead end]." And that kind of questioning didn't stay in the black press very long, but it even got that far. Here is the national press…now, by the end of the year, King has his Nobel Prize. He's Time's man of the year. Wilkins had next to nothing to do. I mean, the march would have taken place even without him. He didn't dare not be at the march. At the time I just thought well, isn't this naïve. Poor old Time is so far behind the times, they're giving a picture of Roy Wilkins which should have been on their 1955 cover instead of their 1964. Or it should have been 1954 and even then, it wouldn't have been deserved because the legal defense fund had already split with the NAACP over how far and how fast [inaudible]. But the NAACP itself does deserve a lot of credit for all that went on in the early 50's in getting those court battles and stuff ready. Anyway, I think now that that was very deliberate. I think Time has always been very closely tied. I think Newsweek is tied, but Time perhaps, a little more so. And Time has been used to deliberately trying to create messages for America that they thought the people of America needed. They helped push Eisenhower's campaign for instance, very early. Reader's Digest, the same. And in fact, I've seen stuff now where loose Reader's Digest people like this had decided long before Eisenhower himself decided that he would run, that he would be their candidate. And they advanced huge amounts of money to him for rights on publishing his books and serializing and articles in Reader's Digest and things like this. And he didn't know they were giving him money to build a campaign chest with 'cause he was such an innocent, honest man that he had no idea that they were funneling money to him that they couldn't give as outright campaign contributions at that time which you know, says nothing against Eisenhower. There was no reason that he should have even thought of those kind of games. Now when I know that those games went on with national magazines, I think pushing Wilkins at the time the direct action phase of the Movement was having its [inaudible] triumph was a deliberate effort to push the conservative leaders to tell Blacks who your leader is again. At the march, there was a fight. Are you familiar with the fight in SNCC?

JONES: No, not at all.

KING: The SNCC speech was censored and…

JONES: Who gave the speech?

KING: John Lewis had been [picked] by SNCC, but had talked with his people about what he would say. Other people, supposedly white liberals…and I assume Wilkins…other people said they would not go [inaudible] speaking at the rally if SNCC spoke and gave a militant…I heard some people said it was a communist speech, and it was a militant speech. SNCC at first said they would not withdraw the speech. Bayard put pressure on them, put pressure on King to save the day, and, at the last moment, SNCC gave in. Many SNCC people furious, many SNCC people thinking John Lewis would never give in, thinking that was their position not to compromise, and they would have him give his speech somewhere else if they wouldn't let SNCC give its speech at the march. And SNCC wouldn't be on the platform. And James Farmer from CORE, the other direct action group which had brought about the march, was in prison in [inaudible] parish. Somebody would have to say somewhere, "What do these other people have to say?" Well, at the last moment, there was a compromise. I don't know who agreed, but I think John Lewis didn't make the decision just on his own.

JONES: What did SNCC get at the compromise?

KING: Nothing. They got on the platform.

JONES: They got on the platform?

KING: Yeah.

JONES: John Lewis was on the platform?

KING: Yeah, and he spoke and gave a watered down speech.

JONES: Ah, I see.

KING: It was still a good speech. SNCC raising some questions. SNCC wanted to criticize the Civil Rights Bill for not containing a voting rights provision…

JONES: Right.

KING: …and saying the heart of what we're fighting about is not here, while everybody else wanted to say we're here. What the government tried to do was turn it into a rally of the liberal coalition, the church, the labor unions, the new deal coalition minus the Deep South, in favor of the current Civil Rights Bill. And SNCC got up and said this bill isn't going to do a thing. This is not what we're after. This doesn't take us out of the streets. This you

know, this is fine. We want this bill passed, but we want more. You're not supposed to say that. That's not the way you do it. We had no reason to think at that point that the bill would be passed. And it shouldn't have been passed. I mean, it took Kennedy's martyrdom, the martyrdom of the children in the church in Birmingham, and other things. I think the purpose of the bill was to quiet the Movement and channel things in to Congress. Kennedy could have done many things. SNCC attacked Kennedy directly and said there are these things you can do by executive order. There are these things that you promised in 1960 that you haven't done and even had a line in there that, "We remember Sherman, and we intend to march nonviolently across the South to Atlanta and from Atlanta to the sea." And then, some more statements about nonviolence. Well, I gasped when I heard that one. I had a bit of a white southern reaction as I mentioned early. Sherman was a lieutenant to Grant at Vicksburg when people in my family had their home burned. And whether Sherman was there or not, he gets the credit, because he was part of the Vicksburg campaign. But Lewis used that line as a shocker and then, made it clear that we were talking about another thing. That we were nonviolent. But what the South had to have was the equivalent of what we had then. That there was nothing left that the white South and the black South could not come together and it was going to take that kind of a thing.

JONES: Cataclysmic.

KING: And that SNCC was willing to do it and CORE and SCLC in a new way, a nonviolent way, which would be better than the violence that brought about the end of the last one. But we had let things drift in America now for a hundred years since last time, and you couldn't kid yourself that you weren't facing a massive upheaval and massive pain and suffering. Nonviolently, SNCC would try to bear a great share of that suffering. I always favored the compromises. And I was almost always wrong. I always thought it was great like, you know, to get Hodding Carter and Charles Evers and black Tougaloo students and MFDP and Millsaps together at the same meeting was a victory to me. And if the price of doing that was compromise, then I always [inaudible] for compromise. What I found out was that other people will use compromise only to like stab you in the back. That not everybody thinks that compromise really is necessary. It's a [inaudible] tool. And I wanted all these reconciliation kind of things. And I thought saying something at the march that was more militant than anybody else was going to say was important and better to say half of it than none of it. And who wanted a split in the movement right here? And if the Movement publicly split and so on, how would we even get this Civil Rights Act passed? I think I was wrong but as I said, I was always a senior citizen advisor to SNCC. And I wasn't in on the debate and arguing about this. This, by the way, that went on. People had been up there. I got there that morning. [inaudible] and the problem was already going. And they

wouldn't have asked me, because everybody would have known exactly what compromises I would have suggested. And how wonderful it is when brethren can compromise. And they tolerated me. And not only was I a drag pulling down, slowing down everything, but I was a white Mississippian on top of it who believed in nonviolence, and they still tolerated me. And still do. They greet me with, you know. Most militant black power [inaudible] gives me a hug when we see each other, run into each other. But I think they had to learn to tolerate me long before the black power thing, sort of a paternalistic liberal on their part, their attitude towards me.

JONES: We're talking about the summer of '63. Who is radical in SNCC at this point? Who were the leading radicals? John Lewis?

KING: All of them were radicals.

JONES: All of them?

KING: Yeah.

JONES: Ok. So there's not…there's not a

KING: I wouldn't single out anyone.

JONES: So there are not two factors within SNCC…

KING: No. There was some [inaudible] within SNCC, like John Lewis, who comes from a viewpoint of having studied to be a Christian minister who is very, very much into Bible things, and reconciliation would have been very high with him. And compromising would have been one that he would have felt he could do as a person. When he's representing a whole organization, it's much more complicated when that organization is representing a point of view that is strong in the black community and will not be expressed at the march on Washington if you compromise and don't give it, which were the things the people told me afterwards when I defended Lewis for having compromised. Then I could finally begin to see that that's not a compromise. The people who should have compromised were the ones who said, "Look, we've got 12 speakers. It is alright to have this, and other people can disavow it." But it is a legitimate position. Many, many black people and a few Whites think this way. So that the compromise ended up an unfair coalition because you didn't have all viewpoints represented and presented. You had them all there, but not presented. Jim Forman's book, I think, has both speeches, the original rough draft and the speech as it was given. As it turned out, Martin King's speech was so wonderful and so sent from God that even if marching nonviolently across the South from Atlanta to the sea, I don't know how many people would have recognized that as playing with Sherman. And it would have been overcome by the

Christianity in Martin's speech, and some people would even have seen that what John Lewis saying was also….was saying was also Christianity. We could have had it said, but the liberals you know, the coalition of people there on the platform, they were saying, "We will not speak if that militant speech is given." And of course, King, those people had to say well, we want you know, these folks to [inaudible]. Catholics, bishops, top dogs in the Protestant church, top labor people, we've got to have them with us. But, once again, it was that element of America thinking it had a right as…to do what it thought best to protect the American people from hearing what Blacks really thought.

JONES: Right.

KING: You know, where would we have been in '66 when SNCC has to shout 'black power' in a obscene way to get attention if they could have said what they wanted to say in '63?

JONES: Sure. That's a good point.

KING: And I still believe that compromise is necessary. I just learned that there are all kinds of ways you can compromise, and you find ways to do it without…without losing the…the…the guts of what you've got to have [inaudible] your side. It can be done, and people can participate in the political process. SNCC was trying this. SNCC was labeled from then until the convention in Atlantic City. People attacked SNCC and said, "You are not political. You do not know how to function." The big attack on the Freedom Democratic Party and SNCC was that you've gotten out of the streets into the political arena where you do not belong. Basically, go back to the balcony. You are out of your place because in this arena you cannot be teenager purist. You've got to learn to give and take and compromise. And we gave and took and offered a lots of reasonable compromises which the damn press wasn't interested in, because they got this theme going of the immature who came into the real world and weren't able. And now we've got to look for mature black leadership, instead of the FDP and SNCC, who can function in the real world. Thank you. You helped get us this far. Bayard Rustin, who pushed that line, wrote a piece in commentary, I think, in one of those kinds of social, democratic, religious-type magazines called "From Protest to Politics". And SNCC had been deeply involved in politics with the Kennedys, with give and take. For years, it moved from protest to politics by going to southwest Mississippi and had gotten run out with violence and yet, Bayard had the audacity to push that in a brilliant article that just wasn't truth, but it was brilliant, and is in most of the anthologies along with major pieces. Ok. The March on Washington, people had talked originally about a thousand people going to Washington and using Gandhian tactics out of India and disrupting the city of Washington by having sit-ins on the airport runways, on the bridges, on the

railroads…a thousand people could have done that for 10 weeks, it only takes a few a day...picketing the U. S. Congress. If there was a filibuster and the Congress would not break it, then we would show that there was no reason the American government should work. And we're saying this in advance and anticipating the filibuster. And as it was, the filibuster was just barely broken with a few, you know, good, mid-western and rocky mountain state Republicans joining us. And Dirksen and his people just barely brought enough Republicans along from those states to break it. So the tactics of seriously facing Washington and making Washington do its business and break the filibuster if the filibuster started. And the filibuster was another sense of civil disobedience, but no punishment, but it was a way of refusing to let other people get on with their business. I would call it civil disobedience, and I think there should be some punishment for it. I think it's a tactic that all sides can use, and it may be a legitimate tactic, and the Congress has a way of stopping it. I would also think the way should extend even further that a senator who helps lead a filibuster, if his party has caucused and is pushing it, ought to have to sacrifice something other than his supper or her supper. And probably does, though. When a liberal leads a filibuster, as some have on appropriations and a few things, military stuff, they probably lose massive influence in the Democratic Party, whereas the southern Democrats who led the filibuster still got their seniority, their positions and everything. So theirs really wasn't civil disobedience. It was being tolerated by Congress, which probably unofficially does punish the people who say, "I've got to stop this, but I will give something of my life and my career to stopping you, and you will say, 'Why am I doing this?'" They knew why the racists were doing it. Anyway, we talked of doing that to Washington as the first target of this nonviolent army. In Mississippi, the talk by the end of the summer had escalated to coming close to non-violent terrorism. It was talk that we and we said we would try to discipline them…

JONES: What is non-violent terrorism?

KING: Well, that wasn't a word anybody verbalized. There was talk of having a general strike in the plantation country and stopping the cotton harvest.

JONES: That's interesting

KING: And we could talk about people stopping a train or a plane in Washington by walking on the runway and the train would probably stop although some people might have been killed, but it would've been killed by somebody swerving on the interstate not wanting to hit you. It would have been an accident. That you put yourself there. It was a risk. And we used to think about what if somebody does kill somebody by accident, do we have any right to put that on somebody's conscience. I mean, we really did sweat as Christians, why are we doing this?

JONES: Sure. Ok, we talked about the strike. We did not approve of the methods Charles Evers was already beginning to use in Jackson to run a 90 percent successful boycott. We said it doesn't have to be, but we need a way to show that the mass of black people [inaudible] at that time are dissatisfied, some way to show that huge numbers of people are represented by the few hundred that go to jail and demonstrate and march that they really do represent masses of people. America had to know this. If again, the Congress was going to get a Republican from Wyoming to vote for the Civil Rights Act, people had to believe that this really is a large-scale thing. We had assumed large-scale things would continue after Birmingham and after Jackson. They didn't. The March on Washington did it by having that many you know, several hundred thousand come together, but we felt we've got to continue for six months. And we want something that people can participate in and identify with. So, we talked of a strike. We knew people would be evicted, thrown off. A year later, we had it on a small scale with the Freedom Labor Union which in the fall of '64 and '65 went on strike in some Delta plantations for higher wages and got evicted. And that's about where that idea ended up and then drifted on off into you know, the farm workers and some SNCC people went from Mississippi to work with the farm workers and help them get started. So we talked that, and we said, "How will we enforce it? How will we, you know, really carry it out?" And people kind of laughed and said, "Well, you know, we can buy somebody's mule wagon. We can have it break down at the right intersection. Three of us can't do it but if we get an old truck and a mule wagon, you know…" We've got to prevent the people who are working from going to the work. We've got to prevent them from leaving one place, hold them someplace. If a busload of people is moving, what do we do to stop traffic so one of us can then speak to everybody on the bus and try to talk them out of it? Well, did we have a right to tie up traffic? We felt we have a right to stand there with your body. That won't tie it up very long. And even then, some of us have [inaudible] kind of problems. Civil disobedience is a damn, heavy thing, because society has to have laws and order. And we knew that. Gandhi knew that and you know, Gandhi would say, "Without prayer and fasting, you cannot make this decision. And who are you, who am I, Mahatma Gandhi, to think I have a right to say I am above the law?" Therefore, we will always be punished. Of course you go to prison. But even then, do you have a right to tie up traffic on the highways? I mean, that's a heavy thing to say that my rights are more important than anybody else's out there, because you're not hitting directly at the leadership and you know you're getting [inaudible] innocent bystanders. We can always say that nobody was an innocent bystander, and we're trying to make every person face it. So we were looking for ways that all Blacks could identify and do something, for ways we could say that all Blacks, or 99 percent, want change. But things that all Whites would see and feel and have to face. So we talked nonviolent army. And some people began to say, "What if too much of the crop gets through? Couldn't we find ways to poison the crops?"

Well hell, we weren't the U. S. Government, you know. We didn't have Agent Orange. But we talked it. Some people sort of laughed and said, "Well, if you can't poison it in the field, we can always burn it." Oh, now that's…and we were nonviolent. We needed occasionally, to let out violent thoughts. Oh, in the late spring of '64, several of us talked for several hours, several of us Whites in the movement, about the symbolism of Thompson's Tank. And shouldn't we go and nonviolently act against the tank because the tank was such an awful symbol in every meaning of the word "awe" because behind it, we knew we could mean real tanks. But the symbolism of a tank is a tank, even though this one didn't quite look that ugly. It was even worse, because it was painted a pale blue, a pretty, pastel, robin's egg kind of color. Natural God-awful obscene to do that. There it was. And it had scared us and we were afraid going into the summer, that repression was going to be so massive. We knew that people would die in the summer, and then some of us who were white who also knew that the movement was testing nonviolence. This was kind of a last round for nonviolence. Shouldn't we go act against the symbol of ultimate violence? We argued it. We didn't do it partially because we were afraid, partially because we thought our leadership would be needed…we didn't need to go to prison…partially because we were terrified of how much we would suffer physically if only three or four people did something like that. Because at that point, people were being beaten badly in jail, routinely beaten and tortured. There was no question that, if we were arrested tampering with the tank, we would be brutally treated or killed. We were willing to do that but against it, we also had this feeling, "Can we go destroy their property?" We know that in Birmingham they are bombing our property, churches and so on. Can we destroy property? And [inaudible] we decided no. We didn't want to face it. We didn't really want to resolve it. But that was flirting with the idea, and underneath it we could have these fantasies, what if we blew it up? Boom! But we don't have bombs. We don't know how. What if we put sugar in the tank, because they had been putting sugar in the tank of SNCC cars, messing our cars up. We wouldn't know where to find the tank. The gas tank surely is protected on that monster. What if you do something to the gun turrets? This was after the tank had already had its debut at Jackson State, and we'd all laughed about it fizzling. But underneath the joking about painting slogans on the tank was still the idea, if you paint a slogan on a wall, wouldn't you really rather tear the wall down? Doesn't that say more than any words you can say? Depends on the slogan. Ok. I think that violence has to be a suppressed part of any nonviolence. It's not bad for it to be there. I was very frightened by the talk going on about a nonviolent strike at the end of the summer and through the fall of '63. Because I felt that it would escalate, in the layers of violence, self-defense and so on, that we couldn't control, would escalate into bands of vigilante Whites and bands of vigilante Blacks. It didn't. I mean, the Mississippi Movement ought to be that today. We ought to be like Ireland. And one of the great successes of nonviolence is that we had so much change without going the

way of Ireland. And with…I mean, if we had 5,000 people dead in Mississippi today, that would still be a very small number for the amount of change we've already had. It may be that we have not yet had the breakthrough yet though, of the change we need for black people to really come out of poverty or to threaten the power of the white people who really control the society. And I may be wrong in praising nonviolence. Maybe nonviolence hindered us. You know, there must be a lot of people in Ireland who think that their thousand dead…it's more than a thousand now…is the right thing. And there are obviously people on all sides in Ireland who think that what they're doing, killing each other, is going to get somebody's goals accomplished. I don't…

JONES: I thought the jury was in on nonviolence. That it was successful. That it turned the face of America around.

KING: You're a historian, and I like history. It's too early.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: It's too early. Way too early. I think…

JONES: Well, certainly in terms of…

KING: I think we can say that, when you have to make a decision, I think we can say, I don't mind saying, preaching that it worked. But I have to say, intellectually, maybe it hasn't worked enough. I think it works better than anything else. I think we would be far worse off if we were killing each other like Northern Ireland. I don't think we'd have as much. But it's still too early. There are too many people suffering and too much poverty with too little power to say they've really gotten much black power yet. Anyway, that was the kind of ideas where we were. A little bit of creativity in it. But you can see it really wasn't a good idea. We couldn't have managed it. We didn't have staff enough had it worked had we called a strike. Into that mix came Lowenstein's idea of the freedom vote in the fall of '63, and instead of doing something in two counties, Coahoma and Leflore, and trying to get some folks in Jackson at the last minute to help with the freedom vote…we didn't call it freedom vote, or they may have began to refer to it…why not do something on a statewide scale, but do something political. What you're trying to say is that everybody wants to do something. That everybody supports the Movement. Why don't you say it in a political way? And it was perfect. It tied into our need to be saying something political that the Civil Rights Act wasn't dealing with, voter registration. But it was a way also, of saying something that people would have something big going that would keep pressure on the nation as it saw it, to keep pressure on for the Civil Rights Act, that be a minor consideration and a major consideration was a way to do something in Mississippi. We didn't think we'd need the extra

help. We thought we could do it with the SNCC staff. And the idea originally was just to run Aaron for governor.

JONES: Yeah.

KING: I was added later at the request of SNCC, in particular Bob Moses, who wanted it to be interracial. I thought it was ridiculous that you could never have a ticket of two people from the Delta, Coahoma and Warren County, the two river counties and you know…

JONES: Sure.

KING: Too loaded in Mississippi. Nobody knew what I was talking about. So, we had an interracial ticket, 'cause that was what SNCC wanted to say and it's what SNCC felt the black people in Mississippi wanted to say about their vote, but it was not to be just a black vote. That certainly was what it was to be the most about, but a minor way of trying to say there could be some reconciliation in this, and Blacks and Whites could work together. And I didn't want that. Was afraid of it. But that was for personal and family reasons and church reasons. I had too many people already saying, "You just do these things for publicity."

JONES: Right.

KING: So that my…I had a lot of personal hang-ups that were in the way.

JONES: I'll bet.

KING: But not very legitimate ways to argue with Bob Moses. But this is when Lowenstein, who had been listening to all our talk about all of these other ideas. Lowenstein probably thinking, "My God, these ideas are coming from Ulan Bator or inner Mongolia," You know, he had his own frame of reference like I put my things into biblical, New Testament or Mahatma Gandhi kind of connections with a little kind of All-American patriotism thrown in. So I colored them the way I wanted. He….and I knew that nobody was going to go and have this great strike and that nobody was going to burn down a cotton warehouse, and we'd never have enough money to rent a car or to you know, have a car old enough that we could afford to let get rammed and knocked around in the streets by blocking the road in the Delta. So I enjoyed the talk. It scared me a little until I realized we'd never be able to do it. Lowenstein may have thought, "My God, they might do something like this" and felt more need to come up with the right idea.

JONES: Right, I see.

KING: But for whatever reasons, it was the right idea and we took it as a wonderful idea with gratitude and immense respect for Lowenstein. Only much later in the last week or so of the freedom vote when the repression became so intense on us, and people all over the state were begging for SNCC, i.e. COFO, but SNCC everywhere except the fourth congressional district where CORE had its volunteers. SNCC sent everybody they had that they could turn a loose of, a skeleton staff left in Atlanta, people dropping out [inaudible], places like this to come down. Tougaloo students working very hard on it and suddenly, we had town after town after town saying, "Come. Give us a speech. We want a rally." Churches were going to be open for community meetings that never had been. We couldn't meet the need. We didn't know what to do, and Al said, "I can get American students." And Al [then called] Stanford University where he'd been on the faculty. And [Eileen Stralitz], the editor of the Stanford Daily, turned the freedom vote into the great cause for the Stanford kids.

JONES: Right.

KING: Dennis Sweeney had already worked in Mississippi in the summer of '63. Al brought Sweeney in and said Sweeney was looking for something to do. He was a pre-ministerial student with Christian enthusiasm of how to work in the world, and Al suggested that Sweeney work with SNCC in Mississippi and COFO. He just meant COFO, but Dennis came very close to the SNCC side of things. At the NSA conference Al had tried to get Dennis to work against SNCC, and that's where they had one of their first splits. And Dennis lobbied Stanford students and other west coast students on behalf of SNCC. And then, Lowenstein felt massively betrayed. And apparently that was very nasty political fighting at that NSA meeting. I never was involved in you know, student politics like that. But when Al had good ideas, we certainly took them. Some people at the higher levels of SNCC had fought Lowenstein at the NSA convention. You know, Cincinnati, wherever it was that summer. And they knew that Lowenstein had smeared them viciously and worked very effectively against them. So they were already afraid of him. They did not know why. They were willing to work with anybody. So if some communist had come in, if some Christian had come in, if some Muslim had come, if some Allard Lowenstein had come, they would work with anybody who could help them. And they would say no to anybody and could say yes. When Lowenstein said, "I can get students from Stanford and Yale." Obviously mostly white. With a little bit of debating. What do we do with them? We've had some white, northern white, volunteers. They've worked out well, but we've had a long time. The other side was that, if we don't have them, we can't do the job. So, the decision was made. We will get them. And within 48 hours people were on the way. And Stanford raised like, I think, 7,000 dollars in about three days to send to the freedom vote campaign.

JONES: That's interesting. That's…

KING: And then, channeled us into a very constructive thing when we were morose and desperate. Had every right to feel defeated, but were so down that we were no longer creative, whereas SNCC had been so creative with its nonviolence since 1960. And Lowenstein helped us channel it in a perfect direction.

JONES: Right.

KING: And then we were so successful with that that we became a threat to that system by the end of '64. Ok, I think that's…

JONES: You bring up a lot of stuff, and I know you…

KING: Well, that goes in a different direction. I think that's a….finishes off a kind of getting out of the summer.

JONES: Right.

KING: Charles Evers, through all of this, NAACP people seeing no sense in it. It's not real. But what Evers wanted to do…and the black middle class still…was concentrate their vote on the real election. Many of those people saying that you had to vote in the summer for Coleman, and many of them saying this time that you had to vote…I think by this point they were saying they wanted to vote Republican as a moderate there and did not…and we were asking them to write Aaron Henry's name in, and they did not want to do that. Some of them probably did, but many of them were saying, "No. This is crazy." Aaron went along with it, but I'm sure it was because of Lowenstein persuading him.

JONES: Well, ok. We'll pick up here next time.

END OF RECORDING